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**“HOW DOES A FEMALE CLERGY’S
PERSONAL EXPERIENCE OF DIVORCE
AFFECT HER RELIGIOUS FAITH?”**

by

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THESIS

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ABSTRACT

How does a female clergy's personal experience of divorce affect her religious faith? The female identity is based in relationship both divine and human. Though there is nothing written about female clergy and divorce, the literature on clergy and divorce is fairly extensive. Professional implications of clergy divorce, the uniqueness of clergy marriage and divorce, differing Protestant theological viewpoints, the need for support systems and personal divorce as resource for ministry, are all examined. To ascertain female clergy's experience of divorce, an analysis of women and crisis, the differences between women and men including how each experiences the Divine, and the different gifts each brings to ministry has been undertaken. A composite case study, an extensive review of the specific scriptures pertaining to marriage and divorce, and a comparison of such are included in this study. The differences in society affecting clergy divorce are addressed.

INTRODUCTION

Edwin H. Friedman has written a wonderful fable called "The Curse". In it he tells us that after Adam and Eve had been cast out of the Garden of Eden, the Holy One calls Satan to help him devise a curse for the human race. Satan takes the task seriously and meets with a committee to brain storm. It proved to be quite difficult because humans are so resilient. Finally Satan and his committee came up with a brilliant idea. Friedman writes:

"Here's the idea: As we know, what most differentiates these creatures from the lower forms is that they have far more capacity for deep emotional bonds.... anyway, it just hit us, why not create a way for those bonds to turn into binds?'..... ' No one will marry the person that is good for them.... everyone will marry the one who brings out the worst in them; weaknesses and vulnerabilities will be the real lures..... No one will choose a partner who challenges them to grow. Everyone will choose mates who play into the very games they're used to playing..... But here's the best part. It will all be done unwittingly in a fog that resembles love but will be called romance....." (Friedman 1990, p. 91-94)

What a sad commentary on marital life and growth as an individual. Friedman continues the story by saying that not only will humans make mistakes in choosing a mate but some will repeat that mistake over and over again. Satan continues sharing his plan with the Holy One, "We are going to create an institution called divorce. If things get so bad they can't tolerate each other, then they will be free to separate and make the same mistake all over again with a new partner." (Friedman, 1990, p.91-94)

As dismal as this story is, perhaps there are elements of truth contained in Friedman's fable. Surely the marital relationship is the most complex of intimate relationships and perhaps causes the most pain when that bond is severed. Beryl Cable in her Master of Nursing Thesis from Dalhousie University writes, "Feminist researchers typically find the objects of their work

in the struggles they have participated in personally..... their research is subjective and interactive. feminist researchers will write about what is or has been intense for them”.

(Cable, 1995, p.1) On that note I have chosen to pursue a very personal topic, I am interested in finding out the impact of a female clergy's personal experience of divorce upon her religious faith. I personally have struggled with this question over the last 6 years as a divorced clergy woman in active ministry. I would never have imagined myself doing ministry while living through divorce but we never know what the future holds. Providing spiritual guidance, leading pre-marriage classes and offering some assistance in the midst of marital difficulties, has been an emotional and spiritual struggle for me. In my own experience and the experience of clergy friends who have divorced, spiritual or religious questions are at the forefront of the issues with which we deal as divorcing people. As female clergy, our very identity centers around the holy. Who is God for us? What does God expect of us? How can we be a spiritual presence and authority in our pastoral practice for those who look to us for guidance? As female clergy, we are very interested in relationship, to God, to each other, and the dynamics with which that entails. I am aware that for some clergy, the questions, the searching, the pain of this experience has been debilitating, so much so that for some it has led to disability and an inability to function as clergy in active ministry. I do believe my thesis question is vital. Ministers are human too and they need compassion and pastoral care in personally challenging times. I believe that we have a long way to go in providing this care for them. It seems that when a divorce occurs there is concern for how the divorce will impact the clergy person's work, their ability to minister to their congregation, but not as much about their own personal doubts and pain. I believe that ministry is changing to such a rapid degree and is becoming more and more a challenging and

stressful vocation. The last thing a clergy person needs is to have grave doubts as to her ability to minister based solely on a personal experience of divorce. To my knowledge at this time, there are no support systems or spiritual direction or anything similar to this available to those who in such crisis so badly need it. This research into the impact of a female clergy person's personal experience of divorce on their religious faith is desperately needed and long overdue.

I believe that a female clergy person going through a divorce deals with a variety of questions and doubts. She questions who she is and what she has to offer. So much of a female clergy person's identity is bound up with relationships and her ability to maintain harmony and work through problems to reconciliation and a positive conclusion. She struggles with intense feelings of failure. Parts of scripture wound us as we deal with them, scripture that shows us God's judgement. Other parts of scripture that refer to the love and forgiveness of God hopefully begin the long process of healing. I believe that a female clergy's religious faith can be strengthened through divorce as she examines and struggles with who she is and what she has to offer to others. The outcome can be a woman convinced of a loving God who walks with her and gratitude for the richness of the experience that she has to offer to others on the journey of faith.

I will use the hermeneutical method to get at my thesis question. I have attempted the qualitative research method but it is difficult to get in the field without violating ethics. People who are hurting and still raw from the serious questions around identity and vocation, are not wanting to speak openly about their experience, at least not at this point in their journey.

I propose to review the literature in the first two chapters, taking a look at how clergy divorce has been dealt with. I also want to look at women in ministry and the differences and similarities between men and women and how these differences play out in ministry. In chapter

three I will present a case study. This is a composite and is made up of a number of cases together. In chapter four, I will present a discussion of the biblical passages especially Jesus' words on divorce. In chapter five, I will consider how the review of the literature and the case study is different and similar. Chapter six will be a conclusion and some final words on the research question.

CHAPTER 1 - The Reality of Divorce

As I began to look into what has been written on divorce, religious faith, and clergy, I have found that there is a huge gap in the literature. I have found nothing pertaining to female clergy and divorce. With reference to divorce and clergy, there have been quite a few articles written covering different aspects of clergy divorce, from the need for support systems, to impact upon a congregation, to systemic perspectives upon clergy divorces and the church family, to implications for the minister professionally, to unique stresses in marriage and divorce and theological and biblical insights into divorce. I would like to look at some of these in relation to my own proposed study.

1) PROFESSIONAL IMPLICATIONS:

First, I would like to look at the professional implications of clergy divorce. Ministers are often penalized with regards to job promotions and their competency questioned. Divorces occur at an alarming rate among professionals. Clergy rank third in the number of divorces granted each year. Robert F. Sinks claims that "The phenomenon of divorce has long been an embarrassment to the Christian church". (Sinks, "A Theology of Divorce," 1977, p. 376) How is it that clergy have such a high incidence of divorce? Clergy divorce carries with it unique ramifications. Ralph C. Krueger reminds us that

"the ministry differs from many other professions, not because a pastor and spouse are above the rigors and ravages of life, but because there is an intensely personal relationship between the pastor and the congregation... a pastor involved in a divorce must not only face the personal after effects which trouble all divorcing people but he is further confronted with the distinct possibility that parish ministry ends for him when marriage ends" (Divorce Clergy Style, 1977, p.15).

The competency of ministers is questioned when a divorce occurs, (Morgan, "Any balm in Gilead for Divorced Clergy?", 1982) In their book, What's Happening to Clergy Marriages? (1980), David and Vera Mace quote Charles Bridges as he speaks to pastors about their family responsibilities in the year 1829:

"If a man knows not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God? For he cannot reasonably expect to perform in his parish the work which he has not cared to accomplish at home...the correctness of our family system becomes to a great extent the standard of our parish...if the parsonage does not show the pattern as well as the doctrine, exhortations from thence will only excite the ridicule of the ungodly.." (as quoted in Mace and Mace, 1980, p.120)

Certainly some of this is outdated and it does beg the question concerning women in ministry. But the suspicion still exists in some churches that you are not entirely competent if you are divorced. In Robert Singer's doctoral thesis, written in 1982, he quotes C. Dale White from "The Bishops Address Clergy Divorce" in The Circuit Rider, June 1979, p.19, "May I ask, how can a pastor and counsellor really do a proper job when he walks away from his first obligation and responsibility?"

Morgan (1982) comments that there is more tolerance these days for divorced people but not for divorced clergy. They are still treated as social outcasts or religious deviants. He claims that the church has maintained a judgmental, restrictive approach toward its divorced clergy and it has been blind with regards to the difficulties these clergy face. They are treated as second class colleagues. They are downgraded and they suffer with regards to career mobility, getting promotions or even moving to a new parish. (p. 25-26)

David and Vera Mace, (1980) claim that even clergy in troubled marriages cannot speak up for fear of professional consequences, for example, being downgraded. A pastor who finds

himself or herself separated or divorced hits the very lowest level of public esteem. Divorced clergy are penalized financially in terms of getting jobs with less pay and responsibility, and they have to work harder to maintain their careers.

An article in Pastoral Psychology written in 1967, entitled "The Effects of Divorce on a Minister's Life" spoke volumes by being written anonymously. Under author, it read "By a Divorced Minister". So damaging was divorce on a minister's career this person could not write openly on his experience. The writer comments on the issue of a divorced minister's competency. The article claims that if two ministers were up for the same job, the minister who was divorced would quite easily get passed over for the job. It was feared that couples having family problems would not seek out a divorced minister for counselling. Would a divorced minister, out of his own sense of guilt, refrain from preaching on marriage, divorce and family life? Because of these concerns, pastorates would often choose against hiring a divorced minister. The fear that the divorced minister would not be able to function completely in his role negatively affected his employability. This article, written over thirty years ago, does not accurately reflect the current situation. There is certainly not the same fear about being divorced and the employment ramifications are not as serious. (Anonymous, 1967, v18, n179, p. 33-38)

2) UNIQUENESS OF CLERGY MARRIAGE

A second theme that came out in the literature was the uniqueness of clergy marriage and divorce. David and Vera Mace have written quite a good book entitled What's Happening To Clergy Marriages? This book doesn't address the situation of female ministers in marriages but it does point out in general the uniqueness of clergy marriage. They claim that the clergy

marriage is an example of God's love lived out.

"A Christian minister's task is to proclaim the message of divine love and to help those who respond to it to grow in love for one another. A married minister can therefore be reasonably expected to provide in his own marriage relationship an image and example of how other people through their united love for God, can grow in the quality of their love for each other." (Mace and Mace, 1980 p. 23-24)

Ministers are expected to demonstrate warmth and tenderness in this relationship and if their marriages are not what they should be, their very faith and ability to minister are called into question.

Congregational expectations are high in every respect for clergy. This stresses the clergy marriage. David and Vera Mace found this to be so in their examination of clergy marriage. Clergy couples shared their feelings and perceptions of the subject of role expectation: "pressure to live up to the image other people have of the pastor and his family...feeling that it is a sin to make a mistake... always being expected to be a model couple....unreal expectations from the laity.. we are put on a pedestal and expected to be almost perfect". (Mace and Mace, 1980 p.49) They believe that clergy couples strongly resent congregational expectations because they secretly have the same high expectations for themselves.

In "Clergy Divorce", Sam Slack (1979) reports on a questionnaire sent to divorced clergy persons to ascertain their experience of divorce. When asked what stress factors contributed to the divorce, the factor rating highest by both men and women was that of role pressures, to fulfill an expected role model. (p.23) Mace's survey of ministerial marriages and Singer's conversations with other male ministers both point out the uniqueness of Clergy marriage. A demanding role model, fear of job loss upon divorce, lack of privacy of living in a manse, and

unrealistic schedule with minimum or no days off contributes to stress in a clergy marriage.

Other stressors include not having time for spouse and family, low financial remuneration, the high risk of sexual infidelity given the contact with parishioners in counselling situations, and pressure on the spouse to be a part of the ministerial team. Some of these are still relevant but some are certainly changing. I will comment on this later in my concluding chapter.

3) UNIQUENESS OF CLERGY DIVORCE

As clergy marriage is unique, so is clergy divorce. Goodling and Smith, in "Clergy Divorce: A Survey of Issues and Emerging Ecclesiastical Structures" (1983), concur that "the trauma of divorce seems particularly painful for the minister. He or she faces role expectations of both personal and professional dimensions." (Goodling and Smith, 1983 p.283) A minister is expected to be an example and standards are higher for him and her than for the rest of society. "Divorce for the minister...is a painful grieving process that puts him or her in touch with loneliness, a sense of failure... the minister often deals at the same time with loss or fear of loss of his professional work and effectiveness within the parish and within his denomination." (Goodling and Smith, 1983, p.284)

Morgan (1982), cites several unique traumas which other divorced persons do not know. Two are accentuated guilt and failure. Divorced clergy are downgraded and their guilt magnified by the congregations expectations. This is compounded by colleagues who question occupational adequacy for divorced clergy. They experience social rejection and loneliness somewhat different from the ordinary person. For clergy, there is no initial rally around of support. They are perceived from the beginning as strange and different and people withdraw from them. They

become victims of a Martyr Syndrome: the church wants no part of them so they want no part of the church. Clergy also experience role diffusion. when they fail at home, they fail at work because these roles are so intertwined. (Morgan, 1982, p. 27) Singer comments that "In no other profession are the philosophy, and performance of vocation so intimately entwined with the commitments, values and behaviour of one's private life." (Singer, 1982, p.38) Divorce is a life altering experience for any who have gone through it, it is even more so for clergy. It permeates to the very soul of who a clergy person is and what they are about.

4) CONFLICTED FINDINGS - DIFFERENT PROTESTANT THEOLOGICAL VIEWPOINTS

A fourth theme in the literature, is the host of viewpoints on theological insights.

To this I would like to now turn. First in general, Protestant theology on divorce affirms the divine intention and sacredness of the marital union but acknowledges human fallibility and the destructive nature of some marriages. It holds that the individual's welfare is more important than the institution of marriage. Wilson yates, in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, an article entitled, "The Protestant View of Marriage", writes,

"When a marriage has reached the point where its members say that 'there is no health in us', that the spirit is no more, then the covenant is no longer a 'living' reality. In light of this understanding of the covenant, persons should do all in their power to nurture its health and care for it so that it might live - and they should end its life only as a last resort." (Yates, 1985, p.53)

Differing Protestant theological viewpoints come from where one finds oneself on the spectrum between conservative to liberal Christian. In "Clergy Divorce", Slack (1979) comments on answers to the survey question, "Did your theological thinking contribute to your seriously considering divorce?" (p.24) He tells us that the majority of women said yes but they were on

both sides of the issue. Some said their belief in God as a loving, forgiving God meant they were accepted no matter what, and others said the marriage vows meant for better or worse and marriage was to be lifelong. (Slack, 1979, p.25)

There are conservative and more liberal viewpoints within Protestant theology. For some, divorce is an issue that causes a dilemma. On one hand, people are pulled by the original intention of marriage being life - long, and yet on the other hand, forgiveness is affirmed. Haddon Robinson in "Sex, Marriage and Divorce", (1992) a "Christianity Today's Reader Survey" commented that of the twenty-eight percent of the respondents who had ever considered divorce, nine out of ten said it was Christian teaching about marriage that kept them together. Seventy - one percent of his respondents agreed that divorce was no greater sin than any other transgression yet at the same time twenty percent of those believed that a divorced and remarried person should not be a deacon or an elder. Thirty percent believed that divorce disqualifies someone from being a minister. The majority of these respondents were both male and evangelicals or conservatives. (Robinson, 1992, p.29)

5) DIVORCE AS SIN? FOR AND AGAINST.

I would like to examine for a moment the more conservative theological viewpoint. For many on the conservative side of the question, divorce is quite simply a sin. In The Fresh Start Divorce Recovery Workbook, (1992) Bob Burns and Tom Whiteman postulate that Biblical marriage is defined as a lifelong covenant where man and woman become one flesh, and divorce of any kind is a deviation from God's plan. Biblically, according to Burns and Whiteman, there is only one grounds for divorce, continuing marital unfaithfulness. Remarriage is only acceptable if

the grounds for divorce was valid. Reconciliation is always the preferred path. Clearly this represents the most conservative end of the theological spectrum. Plekker, in Divorce and the Christian, What the Bible Teaches, goes so far as to claim that "Divorce is a symptom of spiritual sickness; therefore the cure for divorce is a spiritual renewal" (Plekker, 1980) God has intentions for humans, and humans have a natural inclination to oppose God's will. It is the hardness of the human heart that is the problem not divorce per se. Throughout the literature I came across time and time again, the concept of all divorce as sin.

Two notable exceptions to this divorce as sin concept can be found in the more liberal theological viewpoint. Sinks (1977) in "A Theology Of Divorce", argues for a yielding to the higher principle of the Great Commandment. He argues that though divorce is a concession to human sin and frailty, sometimes it can be an accepted alternative. He uses the concept of situation ethics claiming that the Great Commandment of Jesus (Matt. 22:37-40) calls all Christians to strive for the most loving action within the context of any situation. Just as Jesus claimed that the "Sabbath was made for man not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27) so Sinks questions "does it not follow that marriage was made for humanity, rather than humanity for marriage? If the institution, important as it is, does violence to the individual, then shouldn't the institution be amended in order that the individual might flourish?" (Sinks, 1977, p. 378) He claims that some divorces are clear acts of sin coming from selfish decisions and actions and as such calls for repentance, but other divorces though resulting from evil are not sin. "They are responsible decisions reached in the context of tragic and limited circumstances." (Sinks, 1977, p.378)

The other notable exception to the 'divorce as sin' concept is the writing of J. Randall

Nichols. The single most comprehensive and up to date work on the subject of clergy divorce is Nichol's book, Ending Marriage, Keeping Faith. (1993) One of the interests that I have in looking at the impact of divorce of female clergy's religious faith is to ascertain the identity struggles she has experienced. Nichols writes, "Divorce is not falling off the path of life, it is taking a different one...those who walk it are involved in a process that has to do with the deepest springs of who they sense themselves to be, what they are now worth, and how they are regarded not only by society but by whatever name they put to that cosmic purpose, destiny and presence many call God." (Nichols, 1993, introduction, p. xv)

Nichols (1993) flatly refuses to view divorce as sin. He claims that there are sinful actions within marriages and within divorces: adultery, child beating, lying, but to label divorce as a sin is 'too wide a net to cast'. (Nichols, 1993, p.72) It is important to examine ourselves to find what we did wrong, what needs our sorrow, our repentance, our forgiveness but divorce per se is too complex a phenomenon to label as sin.

6) DIVORCE AS RECONCILIATION?

Nichols argues for a reframing of what reconciliation is about. He agrees that reconciliation is something to be strived for. Instead of viewing reconciliation as an end of conflict and differences and a continuation of the marriage within an agreeable and positive relationship, he believes reconciliation happens when mutual destructiveness and hostility end and the boundaries of the relationship have been redrawn so that destruction of the partners cease. This reconciliation can happen in divorce. It may be a joining together in a better marital relationship than was present before or it may mean a separation and divorce. He claims that

"whatever arrangement works toward these goals is in service to reconciliation on biblical, spiritual grounds." (Nichols, 1993, p. 41) The Greek word that the New Testament uses for reconciliation means exchange, exchanging destructiveness for a relationship that has no destructiveness in it. Nichols states his intention in this area "I want those of us who are divorcing and trying to maintain a pattern of responsibility based on spiritual commitments to see even our ending marriages as potentially a form of what both the theological and secular worlds value so highly, reconciliation." (Nichols, 1993, p. 51) It is questionable whether it is possible to have a relationship void of destructiveness but Nichols is correct in his claim that reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel.

Nichols claims that in the Old and New Testaments, no human has ever duplicated the faithfulness of God's covenant. God, however, still redeems our brokenness. Our broken vows are gathered up and transformed by a God who loves always. Burns and Whiteman's concept of covenant is something that we are bound to live up to. Nichols shows us that for humans that is often impossible.

7) OUR APPROACH TO SCRIPTURE DETERMINATIVE FOR DIVORCE INTERPRETATION

Nichols claims that how we look at scripture determines what we will hear or not hear about divorce. He writes, "a person who sees the Bible as an attempt of religious people to understand, interpret, and pass on what they experienced as the work of a transcendent God in their lives will hear something very different, perhaps from the one who views the Bible as a definitive statement of God's cosmic laws for human behaviour." (Nichols, 1993, p. 87) In other

words what we bring to the Bible is important as well as what it brings to us. Furthermore, he claims that biblical writers nowhere discuss the rightness or wrongness of divorce, only regulations concerning divorce. His final word on the subject is that those who have experienced the brokenness of divorce are sought by God so that God can restore, not condemn. There may be parts of the divorce process that call for repentance and we are called to repent, allowing God to restore us to wholeness. In the New Testament, divorce is connected with humans' hardness of heart. God waits to see us turn around.

8) THE NEED FOR SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Those who are going through divorce are broken. I believe that the pain and identity issues, feelings of self worth are compounded for clergy. In that vein, another theme from the literature emerged, the need for support systems. David and Vera Mace break new ground in drawing attention to the need for help in clergy marriages before they get to the point of complete marital breakdown. Prevention is paramount. They claim that the whole field of intimate relationships is shrouded in secrecy. Our culture and our churches help sustain this. We need to be able to break from this and have the courage to be honest about our marriages and the realities of our own lives, to own the struggles before us. (Mace and Mace, 1980 p.58-59)

Mace and Mace suggest education and availability of counselling for clergy couples within receptive, encouraging, supporting, congregations and denominations. One of the issues that we need to remember in terms of support for clergy divorcing is how we approach the situation theologically. In many of the articles, as stated before, divorce was considered a sin, without much thought, just unilaterally, automatically considered a sin. Sinks and Nichols argue

against this conception. This needs to be thought about as we enter the area of support. When a clergy person is struggling with so many fundamental issues of faith and life, the last thing they need is to be forgiven for a sin they did not commit (Nichols, 1993, p. 69).

Thomas Needham(1992), in "How Not To Fail Hurting Couples"(1992), claims that "couples in crisis also need support for their faith. Perhaps more so than other sufferers, victims of marital dissatisfaction may wrestle with questions about God's goodness or love...they need prayer, referral to a competent marital therapist and ongoing pastoral counsel and care". (Needham, 1992, p. 37)

Morgan (1982), gives us a glimpse as to why support systems for clergy going through divorce have been slow in coming. He shows us that according to the Kinaird Survey (Christianity Today, June 6, 1980) clergy lag behind the general population in its acceptance of divorce as a viable option. How therefore can clergy get support from the church and their colleagues if clergy in general do not recognize divorce as a realistic option? Morgan claims that "Divorce represents failure to the church in the same way that death represents failure in medicine." (Morgan, 1982, p. 26) The church and the gospel are about intimate relationships with God and with one another. It is about love freely given and received. Divorce is therefore conceived of as the ultimate failure. There is an ambiguity that remains about the issues of divorce and remarriage. Certainly there is no consensus theologically. People do not always display grace in the face of divorce and remarriage.

9) DIVORCE AS A RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY

Nichols (1993) went far in claiming that divorce is not a sin. Sometimes divorce is the

best option, the lesser of two evils. Divorce can be a life-giving alternative to staying in a destructive marriage. A ninth theme that came out of the literature is the possibility of divorce being a resource for ministry. Divorce, even though it was for most people an incredibly painful struggle, also can be utilized for the pastor as a resource out of which one can minister more effectively (Morgan, 1982; Messer, 1989). The concept of wounded healer emerged. Divorced clergy could offer their wounds as a source of healing for others. Divorce and remarriage could be seen as a living example of God's grace and God's power to recreate something beautiful out of what once was broken. The divorced clergy might be one who is more in tune with his or her humanness and less judgmental. In any support system, we need to pay attention to this element. We need to help clergy to see that God can use the ashes, the broken fragments, of our lives to build again, not only in our own lives, but also in the lives of others to whom we minister. Donald E. Messer (1989), states that "to be a wounded healer, one must, first of all, affirm and accept one's own life story". (Messer, 1989, p. 87) To support a clergy person through divorce, they need to be reminded that's God's grace is available for everyone, themselves included, and that God always has the power to recreate.

Debbie Ford, (2001) in her book, Spiritual Divorce, adds to the literature. She speaks to the issue of using the pain of divorce as a resource, by learning from the experience and having gratitude for all God's gifts, even the gift of divorce. Ford claims that "A spiritual divorce is one in which we use our divorce to improve our lives and our experience becomes one of gain rather than loss" (Ford, 2001, p. 5). Ford further postulates that no matter what has happened to us in our lives, nothing is accidental. We are to use each situation for greater self-awareness. Nothing happens that is not Divinely ordered for our own support and evolution .

(Ford, 2001, p. 24) We are attracted to the people we are attracted to for a specific reason, to help us confront our issues and grow.

“Our soul’s vibratory frequency creates a field of resonance that surrounds us and attracts those people who vibrate at the same frequency. If you have issues with being abandoned, you vibrate at a particular frequency, and you attract people in the same frequency that will abandon you. Until you heal this wound, you will continue to attract people who bring it to your awareness. (Ford, 2001, p.108)

In this awareness we also take into account the wounds that we need to heal, and we begin to take responsibility for our actions. She even goes so far as to say that “the breakdown of your marriage is for your higher good”, (Ford, 2001, p. 9) We are all on a spiritual journey to wholeness and healing. One of the most important aspects of this journey is to learn forgiveness, not only for others, but especially for ourselves. In the presence of God’s grace and perfection, we can let go of right and wrong, and begin this process of forgiveness. It may mean reinterpreting most of our marital history. In finding the blessing in our failure, we can offer it to others for their growth and learning. Ford comments on her own divorce,

“Now, standing in the doorway of forgiveness, I was able to look back and claim complete and total responsibility, not only for creating my marriage and separation but for how the rest of my life will turn out. Only then could I use the gifts of my marriage and appreciate the lessons that life had given me. This wisdom enables us to surrender our resentments and reconnect with our divine nature. (Ford, 2001, p. 170)

Part of being able to see all of life as a blessing to be used and appreciated, is seeing life through the eyes of gratitude. We can look at life thinking that we are entitled to the best of everything, especially a fulfilling marriage. When that doesn’t happen we can end up blaming, life, God and anybody else we can pin our unhappiness on. Gratitude is a gift that comes from

wisdom. “When you choose to live a spiritual life, you come to understand that everything you receive is a gift. If you are blind to the gifts that have been bestowed on you, you are missing the opportunity to know God.” (Ford, 2001, p. 162)

In summary, there are unique ramifications of clergy divorce including lack of job promotions, possible job loss, lack of confidence in ability to minister, and a higher sense of guilt and failure. Even clergy sometimes judge other clergy harshly when their marriages fail. Marriage is certainly meant to be lifelong. When that does not happen for clergy, clergy struggle with their own high expectations and that of their congregations.

There is uniqueness in both clergy marriage and clergy divorce. Unreal expectations for the clergy and his or her family add stress to a marriage that may already be undergoing enough stressors. Often pastoral charges want the best of both worlds. They want a minister that will work long hours and do a good job while on the other hand expecting them to maintain a good marriage and home situation.

There is a great disparity between conservative and liberal Protestant theology. The conservative side of the spectrum argues for divorce as a sin. The liberal side argues for compassion and restoration. In the middle are those who struggle with God’s intention and the need for acceptance and mercy. Divorce as sin and divorce as reconciliation are both evident in the literature. The approach to scripture is crucial. How one approaches scripture determines what we will find there.

There is a great need for support systems for clergy who are navigating the stormy waters of divorce. Within a support system, ministers could be educated to use their own pain as a resource for their ministry. The image of wounded healer could be helpful in bolstering the

clergy's confidence to minister.

Divorce affects a female clergy's religious faith in that she is forced to struggle with the opinions and expectations of her congregation and herself. She is forced to confront her images of God. Is God an unrelenting Judge as the good people around her often reflect? Is God all merciful and forgiving as some claim? Is God a God of love if God would allow such pain into her life? As well as her view of God being challenged, her very identity is questioned. Her confidence level initially takes a beating. Can she, as a divorced person, a person who has experienced failure on such a personal level, continue to minister to others in a competent way? Can she deal with her sense of failure and guilt and come out the other end stronger and better prepared for ministry? She is challenged to forgive herself and others and to take responsibility for her life and actions. She is called to begin to cultivate a gratitude attitude, knowing that all that she has are gifts from God. A female clergy's religious faith is affected by being questioned and challenged.

I want to understand how a female clergy person's personal experience of divorce impacts her religious faith. I would like to glean some insight into the integration of their divorce and their religious faith that female clergy experience. I want to get at the essence of this experience for clergy women, the characteristics, and the symbols that come forth from this experience. I want to know how women make sense of the unique situation in which they now find themselves. These are the things I want to discover. Hopefully when we know more we will be able to offer whatever support, and help is needed for the growth and well being of both divorcing ministers, the congregations they are a part of, and the larger denomination.

I have not come across anything relating to women clergy and divorce. Next I would like to turn

22.

to the issue of women's spirituality and look at how women and men are different in the role of clergy.

CHAPTER 2 - Women's Experience

In reviewing the literature, I found that there was nothing written specifically about female clergy and divorce. I want to examine literature that might highlight some differences between men and women and how those differences might lead them to experience divorce differently. I found several issues emerging from my reading. First, women's greatest crisis is often divorce and that crisis is a crisis of identity. Secondly, they tend to take on much of the responsibility for making relationships work. Thirdly, there are differences between women and men. Some scholars believe these differences are innate and some believe it is a function of the roles men and women play. Fourthly, women tend to experience their connection with the divine differently than men do. Finally, men and women bring different gifts to ordered ministry.

1) DIVORCE - WOMEN'S GREATEST CRISIS

Margaret Wold in her book, The Critical Moment, How Personal Crisis Can Enrich A Woman's Life, highlights this first issue when she writes "by far the greatest number of women I interviewed identified divorce as their greatest crisis". (Wold, 1978, p. 1) Careers by women have increased, but the role of wife, and relationships with their children and spouse, is still crucial for many women. A major crisis ensues when marriage ends. In their book, Clergy Women An Uphill Calling, Zikmund, Lummis and Chang(1998), state that from their 1993-94 survey of female and male clergy across fifteen predominantly white Protestant denominations, divorce wasn't the norm for active clergy but it was still problematic with reference to female clergy. Three out of every ten female clergy have been divorced as compared with two out of

every ten for males. Divorce among female clergy has also increased since the 1970's. Divorce for female clergy doesn't seem to be connected to their work as ministers. Females are twice as likely to have been divorced years before entering ministry. Zikmund et al (1998), conclude that therefore the stresses of ministry are not a factor in the divorce of most women clergy. Men tend to get divorced during the time they are in active ministry "Clergy men are more likely than clergy women to go through the kind of divorce that upsets denominational executives and disrupts church life." (Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang, 1998, p. 41) This writer believes that divorce in women's lives is a factor in leading them toward a call to ministry. Questioning their religious faith, finding a deeper sense of themselves, and hopefully finding a gracious higher power would lead some to want to help those suffering similar pain. This struggle could certainly lead one to seek out ministry. Perhaps that is the reason for the higher incidence of divorce of female clergy prior to their entering the ministry.

Wold (1978) in The Critical Moment, claims that the crisis of being, the issue of identity, is the central component in any real crisis. She writes, "This crisis period will come between leaving friends who are associated with the former activities and before finding new friends and groups who affirm me in my new identity. The feeling of not belonging anywhere, of being in limbo, brings to the surface basic anxiety and the dread sense of abandonment." (Wold, 1978, p.25)

Wold confirms that many questions assail women about our sense of who we are and ultimately the primary question is "Is there a God?", and if there is, "Where is God in this situation?" Discovery of our own strength is the gift in any crisis and seeing God as the Giver of that gift is the 'ultimate good'. "The discovery that God is *real* and *real for me* is the miracle of

a God who moves in, surprising us with joy in the middle of pain, comfort in our lonely abandonment and power in place of our phobias and fears.” (Wold, 1978, p.72) Out of the pain and death of divorce, there is new life. And in that new life new ways of being open up to us. We rework, rethink, re-examine, and redefine our lives. We find God more real to us perhaps than ever before. In crisis there is so much potential for spiritual and emotional growth and divorce is a prime example. Spiritual and emotional growth does not always happen as a result of a crisis. We have to be open to looking at ourselves, exploring our inner territory, allowing ourselves to be vulnerable. We have to have faith in ourselves and believe that the past does not determine the future. We can grow and learn. Weathering our own crisis often prepares us for ministry to others.

2) WOMEN’S RESPONSIBILITY FOR RELATIONSHIPS

Secondly, women take upon themselves the responsibility for making relationships work. This issue overlaps with the issue of differences between men and women. One would think that guilt would be present only if a person left a marriage by their own accord, but according to Wold and the women that she interviewed, even if the man has initiated the divorce, women blame themselves. They assail themselves with questions like “What did I do to make him reject me?” and “ Could I have done more to make the marriage work?” (Wold, 1978, p.99) Women take on a major part of the responsibility for making relationships work perhaps because relationships are so integrally intertwined with their sense of identity.

3) DIFFERENCES IN WOMEN AND MEN: INNATE OR FUNCTION OF ROLE?

Thirdly, there is the issue of differences between men and women. Carol Gilligan (1982) believes that these differences are innate. In her book, In A Different Voice, she shows us what she sees as the crucial differences between men and women. Separation and individuation is central to the identity of boys whereas intimacy and attachment defines the feminine identity. Sensitivity, and empathy are built in factors of the female identity. Gilligan, in a discussion of Janet Lever's work studying 181 fifth grade, white, middle-class, children, ages 10 and 11, states: "Most of the girls whom Lever interviewed claimed that when a quarrel broke out, they ended the game. Rather than elaborating a system of rules for resolving disputes, girls subordinated the continuation of the game to the continuation of relationships". (Gilligan, 1982, p. 10) Lever found that boys play in large groups and more competitively. Girls by contrast, spend time in small intimate groups and engage in cooperative play. When women are asked to describe themselves they often do so in terms of relationship, "I am Roger's wife" or "Mary's daughter." Men by contrast often describe themselves according to what they do, their achievements, their success. (Gilligan, 1982, p 159-163)

Gilligan also claims that in terms of moral development, women differ as well. Freud postulated that women's sense of justice was compromised because of their refusal to be impartial. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 18) Kohlberg continues this concept in his theory of human development. He believes that in order for women to become truly mature morally, they have to enter the arena of men's work and activity where they will see how deficient their perspective is and learn to subordinate relationships to rules and universal principles (Gilligan 1982). Women's care and sensitivity to the needs of others is now problematic in their moral

development. Women tend to think in terms of exercising their rights without interfering with the rights of other people. We also have a high need to be responsible to ourselves, our family and the world. (Gilligan, 1982, p. 21) Gilligan concludes, “The psychology of women that has consistently been described in its greater orientation towards relationships and interdependence implies a more contextual mode of judgement and a different moral understanding. Given the differences in women’s conception of self and morality, women bring to the life cycle a different point of view and order human experience in terms of different priorities.” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 22)

Carol Tavris (1992) in her recent book, The Mismeasure of Woman, takes issue with Gilligan and cites new studies that show us a different picture. Tavris believes the differences found between men and women are not innate but a function of role. She believes it is true that women for years have been seen as “the other sex”, measured by a male yardstick. The male adult life cycle postulated by Erik Eriksson is the norm. If we, as women, do not conform, we are deficient. She comments that articles in magazines and books would lead us to believe that “women have lower self esteem than men,they do not value their efforts as much as men do,.... women are less self confident than men,.... less optimistic about their abilities,... and they are more likely to repress anger than men.” (Tavris, 1992, p. 27)

In recent years there have been many studies on the human brain trying to ascertain whether there are physiological reasons for the perceived differences between women and men. Tavris jokes, “at last we will know the reasons for all the differences between men and women.....such as why men won’t stop to ask directions and why women won’t stop asking men what they are feeling” (Tavris, 1992, p. 43) Unfortunately, there really hasn’t been conclusive

evidence with such tests to explain differences at all. Studies in sociology have shown that it is not whether one is male or female that highlights differences but the role one plays. For instance, single fathers, who are the primary caregiver of their children, are as nurturing and skilled as women when caring for their offspring. (Tavris, 1992, p. 63)

Tavris claims that women think they are more empathic so in tests that ask them to grade themselves on compassion and nurture, they score higher because they *think* they are better. Men also believe that women are better in this area. In actuality, in studies that has measured physiological and behavioural signs of empathy, there are no appreciable gender differences.

“Alfie Kohn, in *The Brighter Side of Human Nature*, examined scores of studies having to do with that brighter side: the human willingness and ability to feel compassion, to behave altruistically, to care for others even at the expense of one’s own interests, to help in emergencies. Over and over, he reports, that while girls and women have a reputation for being more empathic and altruistic, and while they are more likely than males to express sympathy verbally for another person, few studies find any real behavioural difference of any magnitude. ‘Where gender differences do emerge,’ he writes, ‘they are typically weak, partial and buried in qualifications’.” (Tavris, 1992, p.65)

Tavris does concede however that “in everyday life, women do appear to have the edge on some kinds of empathy: they are, on the average, better able to ‘read’ men and interpret male behaviour”. (Tavris, 1992, p. 64) She attributes this quality not to “feminine” skill but a “subordinate” skill. It is self preservation, Tavris argues, to be able to predict and understand the behaviour of men when they are in a leadership role. The same is true when men are in the subordinate position. The primary difference in men and women as regards empathy has more to do with the role they play in life than with any innate advantage or disadvantage. Women tend to

take on a bigger role in caretaking and the sustaining of relationships and therefore they are better at it.

Tavris further argues that women and men differ in their styles of emotional intimacy. They express their needs for intimacy and autonomy differently: “but the point here is that differences in style and expression must not be confused with differences in male and female nature or capacity or personality traits. If most men do not demonstrate their needs for attachment or their dependency on others in the same way most women do, it is not fair to accuse them of fearing attachment or being incapable of love and an ethic of care in their moral reasoning.” (Tavris, 1992, p.87) Both autonomy and relatedness are positive goals in themselves. Men and women differ in how they achieve these goals.

When it comes to love, men are often seen as deficient. Their friendships are looked at as trivial and superficial because they are based on common interests whereas women’s friendships are looked on as better because of their shared feelings and greater capacity for connection. The truth is each sex is relegated to a different realm of expertise: women are expected to be good at nurturing and relationships and men are expected to excel in the world of work. Unfortunately society tends to value men’s area of expertise more than women’s. Women are the ones expected to deal with the arena of relationships. Tavris states,

“The female domain of emotional expression is part of women’s general responsibility to keep their relationships humming along and deal with any problems that occur. Marriage is the wife’s territory, her domain of expertise. It is *her* job to know how everyone is feeling and in order to head off problems at the pass. Naturally, she is motivated to talk; she needs to know if anything in the relationship needs fixing, because she will be blamed if she doesn’t fix it.” (Tavris, 1992, p.265)

Joan Borysenko in her book, A Women’s Journey to God. Finding the Feminine Path.

agrees with Gilligan and differs with Tavis when she cites a study that seems to lend credence to the fact that women and men are innately different in terms of relationships and empathy. Borysenko cites a study by British Psychiatrist David Skuse in which he studied eighty girls and young women with Turner's syndrome, the genetic disorder where women only have one X chromosome. Inheriting the gene from dad gave them normal social skills. The gene from mom meant that they had little or no social skills, they irritated people, hurt their feelings and had trouble sustaining relationships. According to Skuse, there is a gene on the X chromosome related to relationality that is switched off when it comes from the mother but operative when received from the father. So women who get a X Chromosome from both mom and dad, are innately relational because the gene is switched on in the X chromosome from dad. Men who only have a single X chromosome that comes from mom with the gene switched off, are not biologically relational. Women with Turners syndrome do not have a paternal X chromosome so they are also not innately relational. Skuse concludes that social skills are there already for women but men have to learn them . (Borysenko, 1999, p. 95)

Tavis concludes that the only real difference between men and women is the stories we tell about our lives. Men and women present different faces to the world. The classic male story is that of the conquering hero, the classic female story is one of passivity waiting to be rescued by her prince. When men and women divorce both are in pain but they tell different stories in public about their grief. (Tavis, 1992, p. 303) That would be the case unless men are encouraged or taught to do otherwise through grief and other support groups.

This writer finds that there is a narrow distinction between differences between men and women based on their personality traits or nature and differences based on role assignment. I

expect that different generations of humans differ. Many men in our own time are more in line with traditionally feminine values and many women are in line with traditionally masculine values. Whether or not we will see grave changes in our society in the future is not known. As long as our society continues to cast men and women in vastly different roles we will continue to raise children and prepare them for the roles that await them. So whether the differences are innate or not, is only marginally relevant, the differences exist and function as a part of men and women's daily lives.

4) EXPERIENCING THE DIVINE: WOMEN AND MEN DIFFER

The fourth issue that emerged in my study of differences between men and women was that women and men experience their connection with the Divine differently. Women are different than men and thus our relation to the Divine will not be the same. Borysenko claims,

“Women are intrinsically mystical, that is, we tend to experience direct connection with the divine. This may occur not only during formal worship, prayer or meditation, but any time. Women often report a deep sense of connection to God as part of friendship or mothering. We see the God in others. Finding God by adhering to specific rules and regulations plans and paths, priests and mediators is not a necessary component of the women's journey. For women there really is no journey. Life and spirituality are one and the same.” (Borysenko, 1999, p.5)

Borysenko claims that the image of a punishing God lacks relevance for many contemporary women and they are tired of feeling guilty because of Eve's sin . She quotes Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza in a 1978 essay, commenting that women's sense of spirituality is about wholeness and healing and love. It is about enabling power in other's lives. (Borysenko, 1999, p. 3) The central element in women's spirituality is the sharing of stories. Our spirituality is rooted in the present,

in personal experience and sharing our stories validates our experience. “Women’s spirituality can be summarized as relational, active, emotional, practical, positively concerned with the healing of the world. ... based on a sense of inner divine authority”. (Borysenko, 1999, p.8-9)

Relationships are important to our psychological development and it is no surprise that our spirituality is also heavily relational. The challenges of life, our successes and our failures inform our spirituality. Our doubts and our disappointments are all an integral part of a feminist spirituality that is based so heavily in the here- and- now of everyday life.

It is very painful to feel alienated from God. Often the injustices of this life lends itself to anger toward the church or God. Women often direct their anger toward a church that will not provide spiritual nurture when a person needs it most. Relationship problems are often the root of a woman’s dark night of the soul whether that relationship be to a person or to God. (Borysenko, 1999, p. 73) Women have a tendency to freely share our stories of pain with others. We find God when the distance between us and another person is dissolved through the sharing of these stories. God is the centre of our lives, and as we come to terms with that, and the theologies that have led to our pain, we are healed. (Borysenko, 1999, p.76)

A part of the journey to spiritual wholeness for women is that time of not knowing. Wilderness wandering and contemplation of life’s meaning is central to women’s spiritual journey. Deconstructing and reconstructing who we are, what we want, who we will be, are essential avenues and streets that we walk upon the journey. So much of women’s spirituality is struggling with *being* as opposed to *doing*. (Borysenko, 1999, p. 259) Our daily lives, living and caring for others puts us into direct relationship with the Divine. We need to accept this and continue to live it. Borysenko concludes, “The most basic message of Sarah’s

circle is simple. Our lives are our paths. Every form of relationship is a relationship to God.... we don't have to repent of who we are to find God. We have only to love as deeply as we can, using every part of our embodied selves to be present". (Borysenko, 1999, p. 287) Trusting ourselves and God, we can be a healing presence to all around.

5) MEN AND WOMEN BRING DIFFERENT GIFTS TO MINISTRY

Finally, men and women bring different gifts to ordered ministry. Carol M. Noren in her book, The Woman in the Pulpit, argues that women and men bring vastly different gifts to ministry. Women often feel a strong sense of call to ministry, believing that God has chosen them for this vocation, they did not choose it. In 1988, the Association of Theological Schools conducted a survey of seminary students in which they found that significantly more women than men gave a sense of call as their primary reason for being at seminary. (Noren, 1991, p. 16) The testimonies that women give show an "emphasis on relationships in ministry. The tasks of ministry are mentioned less than how the preacher understands herself and others." (Noren, 1991, p. 19)

When women preach, they offer something different. In biblical interpretation, women often identify with a character from the text and almost always it is the least powerful character of the story. (Noren, 1991, p. 65) The question arises as to whether this is a gender issue or as Tavris would have us believe, a product of living in a powerless position. Women tend to also use concrete experiences for illustrations. Everyday life and relationships become the resource book for stories in women's preaching. This is positive as it makes the point so much more accessible to people in the congregation. Women focus on relationships and

reconciliation, both human and Divine, when they examine the biblical text. We use more relational language, our sermon is more people oriented, whereas men use more language related to power and institution. Noren claims that “the predilection to interpret texts in terms of achieving equilibrium in relationships is not a conscious decision made by women preachers, but reflects Gilligan’s and Eriksson’s assertion that feminine identity is awakened or established in a relationship of intimacy with another person.” (Noren, 1991, p. 108) Women also examine and interpret the text based on her own experience, her own internal authority. Does what I encounter in the text resonate with my experience of relationships and the world? Women value experience, their inner voice, intuition, as they read scripture.

In summary, men and women are different. The greatest crisis in a woman’s life is often divorce. It is a crisis of identity. Women’s dark night of the soul is often about relationship problems whether that be our relationships with others or with God. Many women that enter ministry are already divorced, which may be one of the factors that leads to ministry. Women feel more guilt about divorce regardless if they are the one who initiates it or not. Marriage is felt to be women’s territory. Women internalize this and if anything goes wrong in the marital sphere, she blames herself and is often blamed by others. Women’s spirituality is so intertwined with relationships that we take upon ourselves the responsibility for reconciliation and harmony. When a marriage fails, the guilt and feelings of failure are so intense that we enter a crisis of identity where we struggle to forgive, to learn and to use our pain for the benefit of others. Women’s greatest need is for intimacy and attachment, their relationships are of vital importance to them and they feel a great responsibility to others. Men’s great need is for separation and individuation. Their area of expertise is the work force and they are greatly

concerned with rules and universal principles. Whether these differences are innate or are a result of the role we play in society is irrelevant as long as we continue to support the status quo.

Men and women experience God differently. Women feel a direct connection with the Divine. We are not prepared to embrace the image of a punishing God anymore. It lacks relevance for us. Our spirituality is inherently relational and often expresses itself in the sharing of stories. We bring different gifts to ministry. The greatest focus of women's ministry is often interpersonal relationships and our intra personal relationship. We preach by identifying with the least powerful character in the Biblical text and by focussing specifically on relationships in the text between people and between people and God. We also interpret the text based on our own internal authority, our experience.

I wanted to know how a female clergy's personal experience of divorce affected her religious faith. A woman is pushed to examine herself, and how she relates to God. Much of our faith is about our connections with others. Divorce for women is a crisis in her relationships with others, and with herself. Can she accept this part of herself and then in turn, as a minister, offer that to others? Can others accept her failure? Can she find images of God that heal? The image of a vengeful, punishing God can no longer have relevance if she is to maintain a connection with the Divine. Since an inherent connection with the Divine is a part of who a woman is, her relationship with God is a vital part of the struggle she faces. Women's need for intimacy and attachment suffers as she experiences feelings of disconnection from God, others, and her own view of herself. Perhaps most important is how we approach scripture. Women often interpret the Bible based on our own experience. In divorce, perhaps as at no other time, we need to learn to trust that internal authority. Would God condemn me for failing? I don't think so. I experience

God as a loving, kind, compassionate parent always willing to welcome me back into the fold no matter what I have done or left undone. Some elements of Scripture as traditionally interpreted wound us deeply. Next I would like to offer a composite case study and then in Chapter 4, I will turn to scripture itself and examine what has been said about divorce.

CHAPTER 3 - A Woman Divorces

The following is a composite case of women and divorce.

Mary remembers the conversation she had with Gregory on their wedding day. She told him she didn't believe in divorce. She asked him if he was sure he wanted this before they stood up before God and all of their friends and family and committed themselves to each other for life. He reassured her that he loved her very much and that they would always be together.

Less than three years later, Gregory became uncomfortable with the forever concept. "I love you", he would say, "But I don't know how I will feel 20 years from now." Too bad he didn't consider that before marriage. Marriage is not about how you will feel 20 years from now - it is a life-long commitment as all the vows testify. As a woman in ministry, Mary's worst nightmare was to be divorced. She wanted to be able to read all of the scriptures from the pulpit with integrity. Perhaps she wanted to be "perfect", to be a model for how to live the Christian life. She wanted to be above reproach.

When her husband said he wasn't happy and he wasn't sure he wanted to be in the marriage, Mary thought, "I can fix this. Whatever it takes. You want space, I'll give you space. You want time, I'll give you time. You don't want to talk, we won't discuss anything important, no confrontation, no conflict." Of course, then, Mary was miserable too. She prayed for strength, for patience, for wisdom. She prayed that God would show her what to do to make it right. It didn't work. When something is wrong in a marriage, one has to talk. One has to communicate. So Mary and Gregory went to therapy. It helped and it didn't. In the short run, it made life a little easier. In the long run, it only served to show them how far apart they were on so many issues. Six years and several rounds of therapy later, the marriage died. Gregory left and

Mary's world collapsed. She remembers going to the post office the day he left thinking, "How can it be such a beautiful day out, how can people be going about their business as if nothing as changed? Everything has changed, my life as I have known it is over".

Along with the usual questions, "What was wrong with me?", "why couldn't I make it work?" and "How am I going to survive this?" , Mary found other questions rearing their ugly heads, questions like , "Can God love a failure?" "How will my church accept this?" How do I deal with the scripture lessons that appear to condemn divorce?" "How can I lead a church if I can't hold my marriage together?"

Mary experienced three phases in her journey through divorce. Mary found that first, there was a need to cling to God, because the storm of emotion around her threatened to engulf her. She felt she had nowhere else to turn but to the one who created her. It is God that upholds her as she pours out her grief. Lying on the floor in the guest bedroom she feels as if she is so far down she will never make it back up again. Portions of scripture help her keep going. The psalms are especially helpful. Psalm 23 "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not be in want". Psalm 121, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills, where does my help come from?" Psalm 56, "When I am afraid, I will trust in you". ... Mary is fearful of how she will continue in her work. She wonders, "How can I walk out the door to go to church to lead worship?" God gives her the strength. She needs to offer back to God thanksgiving for being with her in this most awful time. She needs to attest to her faith, that no matter what happens God is there. More real perhaps than before. She thinks, "How can I go and visit people on the charge?" God reminds her that there are many hurting people and in being with them her own troubles are put in some kind of perspective. It does help to focus on someone else's troubles not her own. Mary

panics, “How can I conduct weddings? How can I stand there and lead people in saying vows that I myself was unable to keep? How can I interact with a couple who have found happiness together when I am so unhappy?” One day at a time she hears from her friends, it won’t always be this raw. Mary can’t think beyond the next few minutes and she wonders, “How can I get up and go about my daily chores, like cooking and cleaning?” Often when God wants to show immense love for us, God uses human instruments. God sends several wonderful women from the church to get her out of the house and feeling better. Lunches would show up in her front porch with a note saying “eat and take care of yourself”..... The first weeks are a roller coaster ride of feeling. She feels rejection of her love and willingness to give, despair that her husband has gone, fear that she cannot make it alone, fear because she doesn’t know who she is anymore. She isn’t Gregory’s wife, she is not a married woman in ministry. Who is she? She feels so alone, yet not alone, for she feels God’s presence all around her. Mary is overwhelmed by feelings of gratitude, to those who are there for her, especially God, and she feels anger that her husband could break their marriage vows and force her to do the same. Self pity and shame ride along on this first part of the journey, self- pity for her life situation, shame because she couldn’t make it work, shame because she wasn’t good enough. Guilt overlies it all - guilt for not living up to God’s intention for her in her marriage. So many feelings that intertwine.

As time goes on, Mary enters a second phase. She finds herself getting stronger to stand on her own. It is then that she is angry at God for allowing this to happen to her. She feels like Naaman when Elisha sends him a message to go and wash in the Jordan and be healed from his leprosy. Naaman must have thought that as a military commander of the army of the King of Aram, he warranted special treatment from Elisha. Mary too expected special treatment. She

railed against God, “I gave my whole life to you, to be used as you saw fit. I studied all those years to be a minister, I prayed and I prayed for your help to make the marriage work. And here I am divorced. I don’t want to be divorced! How could you allow this to happen to me? If you love me, how could you allow my worst nightmare to happen?” As a teenager, Mary saw a sister and a brother get a divorce and she realized that many marriages are not happy. She sees a couple in the community go through a divorce and she hears the talk about them. She prays, Lord, don’t allow me to get married if I can’t have a happy home”. Mary thinks, “I sought your will in this marriage, others do not and they get along just fine. Why? I haven’t done anything horrible in my life, I’ve tried to do what is right, so why is this happening to me?” Mary knows she has faults, but she also knows the sacrifices she made, the things she has done for Gregory. She thinks of people who are married where wives do not appreciate their husbands. Why didn’t it happen to them? Why her? Friends like Job’s comforters, offer their take on the situation. “God must have planned this situation, and looked and chose to give it to you knowing that you would be able to handle it without losing your faith!” Another said, “The Lord allows distressing situations to come into our lives to teach us to walk closer to Him.” One person dares say, “It takes two to make a marriage, and two to break a marriage”. She thinks, “Hang on while I move so that you can twist the knife in deeper!” Still another said, “Have you tried praying?” (That one was laughable). It wasn’t worth engaging in a discussion of free will. Gregory had a choice and he chose not to be married to me anymore. At this point, Mary is feeling cynical. In her pre-marriage classes it takes everything she has to not be sarcastic about living together in marriage and about the divorce rate. Each wedding is a chore. She fights her own sense of futility in order to help them prepare for the wedding and the marriage. Mary feels such hurt and shame when

people make comments about divorce that are degrading. A woman in a pastoral visit comments. “ I have a good friend whose daughter is having a baby baptized. I’ve also been invited on the same weekend to another friend’s wedding. I can’t go to both. But you know, my friend who is getting married has been married before, she might be married again, but Jenny will only be baptized once. I think I will go to the baptism”. Mary is sure that the lady has no idea how that sounded - that if you are divorced, you somehow don’t take the commitment of marriage seriously.

Mary then enters a third phase. At a retreat, she talks with the retreat leader about her sense of failure. He asks, “Are you not permitted to be human? Are you not allowed to make mistakes? Can God not forgive you?” It opens a door in her thinking. Mary wants to be perfect. She is not. God loves her anyway. She needs to believe that and internalize it. She must accept herself, faults, mistakes and all, just like God does. She needs to forgive her husband and herself for their inability to live up to God’s best intentions for their marriage. She has to learn to forgive no matter how hard it is because it is in forgiving that we are forgiven. Bitterness could have no place in Mary’s life for she knew that would color her whole ministry and destroy her. If she can accept and forgive, then she can offer her experience to others in her ministry who also feel that they cannot measure up. Suffering gives birth to compassion and opens our eyes to the hidden hurts around us. Pat answers become abominable to us and we are more willing to struggle with the questions even when there are not good satisfactory answers. Mary knows that God binds up the brokenhearted and heals their wounds. She has begun to feel that in her own life. Her experience can be a rich resource for ministry if she allows it to be. God takes the difficult circumstances of life and works it for good. Hope is a vital part of phase three. Hope of

getting to the point where the thought of another committed relationship does not bring pain and fear. Hope of a brighter future. When Mary sees couples come for pre-marriage counseling where one or both have been married before, and yet are willing to try again, her hope is renewed in the resiliency of the human spirit and the grace of a loving God. Mary knows that it is through trials that we become who we are. Adversity makes us stronger. Difficult life situations build character. Mary laughs. She knows she has character enough. Mary still believes that marriage is a life-long commitment. But it does not always work out that way. It is sad but it is forgivable. Mary knows her life and her ministry will be richer for having experiencing the poverty of divorce.

Now Mary tries hard to maintain the third phase but there are times when she is right back with the shame, hurt and guilt and anger that she felt in phase one and two. Six years after the divorce, on a new pastoral charge, one of her people is forced to defend her minister's marital status to her father who says, "How can your minister teach and lead a church spiritually when she can't even hold a marriage together?" This person tells Mary about the conversation and how she stood up for her. It hits her like a sledgehammer. She feels such sorrow to place someone in the position of having to defend her. It also angers her that some people hold such narrow views. She works hard to climb back to phase three where she knows she is loved and accepted and she can help others feel loved by God too. Mary knows that she will struggle with this throughout her life and her ministry. But she knows she can continue the struggle and live each day with God's strength and acceptance, for that is all she needs.

Mary has struggled mightily with this experience of divorce. She has learned a lot through suffering. She can identify with the model of Jesus as suffering servant. She has lived and

experienced the verse from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, 12: 9-10. "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness. So I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me....for whenever I am weak, then I am strong". In this journey, Mary has found God to be a solid strength for her, holding her up when she could not do it alone. Mary has known desolation, darkness, abandonment. She knows what it is to hope and pray things will turn out alright. But life is filled with ambiguity, no one knows what the future holds. She believes in the possibility of resurrection but the only guarantee we have is that God will be with us no matter what valley we walk through. God has shown her that her strongest weakness will be her greatest strength. Her journey through divorce and the soul searching that has gone with it, her experience of being carried by God is a gift she will use for others.

Mary's concept of God has changed in this time of searching. Before the marriage breakdown and subsequent divorce Mary knew God to be loving but she also experienced God as demanding. All through the troubles in her marriage, she felt that there was no way out, she *had* to make it work. She had made a covenant and it was up to her to live up to her vows. God demanded it. Working through the pain of her divorce and experiencing God's love and strength there when she most needed it, she realized that although God intended a lifelong commitment for human marriage, God was very forgiving and loving in the event of failure. Mary experienced God in a very parental role in the divorce, but not as a demanding parent expecting rules to be followed. She experienced God as a loving parent who wants the best for his or her children, and who hurts with them when they hurt, even when some of the hurt has been brought on by their own actions. She has felt the unconditional love of God that she did

not quite know before.

Mary's religious faith has changed. She still believes in a loving God who cares for God's children but it doesn't have so many demands. It is a more forgiving love. She is less rigid in her thinking theologically. She can see more of the gray area in life, there is less black and white. She is more willing to accept people where they are and call them to be the best they can be. God's unconditional love has made her more understanding and accepting of people and their life choices. She believes even more in new beginnings and the possibility of change. She is convinced more than ever that we are all God's children loved just simply for being. We are inscribed on the palm of God's hand.

Mary's concept of ministry has been fine tuned. She has always believed in God's love available for all but she finds herself listening more and judging less. She is able to point out areas of growth for others when that is sought. She knows she does not have all the answers. A black and white theology has been replaced with a willingness to live with the questions. She knows that life is often a theology of the cross, living in darkness, feeling abandoned, believing in resurrection but knowing that sometimes it doesn't turn out that way. Sometimes survival is that best we can hope for. Mary is more sure that God journeys with us in all those dark times of life and gives us strength.

Mary's concept of church, unfortunately, has been reaffirmed. She had seen evidence before of the church being a place that wasn't always welcoming and accepting. The church is where we should be able to go and receive nourishment for our souls and support for our lives. Throughout her divorce Mary has again experienced the church as less than welcoming. It saddens Mary that this is the way it is. Many churches are still demanding and judging. She will

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do her best to promote welcome and caring in the churches she serves.

Chapter 4

What does the Bible say?

We can have no adequate discussion of the impact of divorce upon female clergy without turning to the Bible and examining what it has to say to us. Perhaps the greatest problem we encounter in this arena is how different conclusions can be drawn by people of integrity and equal commitment to the authority of Scripture. People may agree on the authority of the ancient Biblical texts while still arriving at various responsible applications of Biblical principles upon modern day living. (France, 1995, p. 11)As we look at divorce and how it affects religious faith in female clergy, a more specific goal is understanding hermeneutics and investigating not only what each passage meant in antiquity but also what it means for our lives today.

In 1988, the United Church of Canada's highest court, the General council, made the decision to allow all members of the church, regardless of sexual orientation, eligible for ordination. This decision was so controversial that it was followed up by a study document written by the theology and faith committee and sent to each congregation. It was entitled The Authority and Interpretation of Scripture.. That document claims, "despite the diversity of ways in which we understand how the Bible is authoritative and how we should interpret it, we Christians still share the conviction that the Bible is a guide for us. It has authority for us in the sense that it informs and empowers us for a life of faith." (United Church Theology and Faith Committee, 1989, p. 19). Scripture is our primary authority, but not our only one. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, used tradition, reason and experience along with Scripture as authorities for Christian living. This has become known as the Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Tradition referred to a collection of traditions handed down to us by our ancestors in the faith; education

and reason were used to incorporate valued discoveries in science and other areas to help lead us to God's truth; and human experience was a valuable tool for interpreting as long as it was done under the Spirit's guidance. All four, tradition, reason, experience, and Scripture, are needed to inform our living as Christians. Wesley still named Scripture as the primary authority.

France, in his book, Women in the Church's Ministry, postulates that even within scripture itself, we see evidence of scriptural principles being re- evaluated in light of experience. He cites the example of the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15 where it was agreed that Gentiles could be full members of the church without first becoming Jews. For Jews this was a major break with tradition. Gentiles had always been seen as unclean. Jews were circumcised. They followed Mosaic laws that showed them as God's special people. They were against intermarrying with other races - they wanted to maintain the purity of God's people. (Ezra 9-10, Neh 13: 23-31) They followed the strict food laws of Leviticus and they would not share table fellowship with non- Jews. The decision to admit Gentiles to full fellowship without having to first become Jews was based heavily on the experience of God's blessing upon Barnabas and Paul's mission to the Gentiles. Scriptures such as Genesis 12:3 - the call for Abraham to be a blessing to all the families of the earth, and Isaiah 49:6 - the call for Isaiah to be a prophet not just to Israel but a light to all nations, and Malachi 1:11 where God's name will be revered among all nations, became influential for the decision of the Jerusalem Council. The apostle Paul's liberal attitude with regards to his Gentile mission was something he often had to defend, and he did so with Scripture (Romans 9-11). God's revelation may be unchanging but changing circumstances may lead us to heretofore unrecognized aspects of that revelation. (France, 1995, p.17). Though France's book is in support of the ordination of women, his argument about how

we interpret scripture is relevant to my thesis question of religious faith impacted by the personal experience of divorce. France shows us that his argument for the Gentile mission has relevance for the discussion of Christians and divorce:

“My point is simply to illustrate that in the ongoing work of God it is sometimes permissible, indeed necessary, for his people to change their minds. What this example illustrates is also that when such a change of mind takes place, it is not necessarily a matter of abandoning the authoritative teaching of the Bible in favour of a secular agenda, but more likely a matter of discovering that there is more in the Bible than we realized, that those strands of biblical teaching and practice on which we have been accustomed to rely in relation to a given issue may not be the only aspects of biblical revelation which are relevant to it. We may be faced, as the Jerusalem Christians were faced, with the uncomfortable task of deciding which of apparently competing streams of biblical thought should take precedence in the new situation in which we find ourselves. (France, 1995, p 19-20)

During a female clergy person's divorce she often struggles with the scripture concerning divorce and the life - long intention of marriage. The United Church's comments around interpretation of Scripture are life giving, as are writers that name experience as important for interpretation. France's claim that other portions of scripture other than those traditionally used in any particular issue, broadens the field for interpretation. Therefore the scriptures become less narrow and burdensome. The woman minister can feel more comfortable with the Bible and its claim on her life.

Andrew Comes, in his book Divorce and Remarriage: Biblical Principles and Pastoral Practice, claims that it is not possible to understand the biblical texts on divorce and remarriage without first looking at God's intention for marriage. This is the way Jesus dealt with the issue when asked by his first century Jewish contemporaries. (Comes, 1993, p.51). There are

four elements or conditions for marriage according to Cornes. First, there has to be consent of both parties. Though marriages were often arranged by parents and often had to have their consent, individual consent was also needed. Secondly, permanence was crucial. Marriage was a binding contract where vows or solemn oaths are made. Thirdly, there had to be public witness to the event. It wasn't just a family affair or just a priest involved, credible witnesses had to be present. Lastly, an important element of marriage is sexual union. Without consummation, there was no valid marriage. (Cornes, 1993, p.39-44)

The pivotal section of Old Testament Scripture that deals with marriage is Genesis 2: 18-24. We are told that it was not good that man should be alone so God created a counterpart for him, a helper. Support, help, companionship are the primary reasons for marriage. Verse 24 reads, "For this reason, a man shall leave his mother and father and be united with his wife and they shall become one flesh". In ancient times, the child's first honour and duty was to his or her parents. With marriage, the child left the family home, perhaps physically, but definitely emotionally and psychologically and the first duty and responsibility was then to their spouse. This was a profound difference because in antiquity children didn't move out on their own and get an apartment and work. They lived with and were fully involved with their family of origin up until the point of marriage. The leaving and cleaving are active things which the man and woman do, but according to Cornes, becoming one flesh is something that happens to the man and woman at marriage. It is not just sexual union. "The union of man and woman in marriage.....is set on the highest and most integral plane: it is a union of persons who together make up a new person. (Cornes, 1993, p.60). Cornes goes on to conclude that the 'creation story is determinative for human marriage'; a new family unit is created - the basic family unit becomes

one's spouse and one's children; they become one flesh, they are no longer separate but one, they are a unity unto itself; in marriage God is the one who joins the partners together; in loving the marriage partner, you are loving yourself, and in marriage you are to reproduce your relationship with Christ. (Cortes, 1995, p. 79-83).

The theological concepts of the permanence of marriage and the joining that happens by God of two becoming one, saddens deeply the person going through a divorce. There is such a deep seated feeling of failure. Failure to measure up to one's own expectations; such a feeling of shame and regret in not being able to live up to God's expectations and hopes for us with regards to marriage, when God has given us so much. How can we not give something back? Is it really so hard to live within a marriage that is not happy? Is an unhappy marriage such a cross to bear? Christ died on a cross for us. Was his cross not harder than ours? There is such a feeling of unworthiness on the part of one divorcing. Theologically, it is easy to feel trapped within the confines of God's expectations and the inability to live up to them. Such is the struggle and burden that a female clergy bears as she lives through her own divorce.

The fact is that regardless of how marriage was intended to be, marriages end. We know that and the Jews of the first century Palestine knew that as well. They had laws to govern such. Let us turn to a brief discussion of the Jewish law on divorce. Apparently divorce predates the mosaic law. The husband has always had total authority in the home and could get rid of a wife if she was not what he wanted. "The Laws of Eshnunna and the Code of Hammurabi were before Moses' time and make reference to laws regulating the existing divorce practice" (Ewald, 1991, p. 22) Our first reference to divorce in the Old testament is from Deuteronomy 24: 1-4. "Suppose a man enters into marriage with a woman, but she does not please him because he finds

something objectionable about her and so he writes her a certificate of divorce, puts it in her hand and sends her out of his house....” Jesus responds to a question from the Pharisees in Matthew 19. He tells them that Moses allowed for divorce, the putting away of one’s wife, only because of the hardness of people’s hearts but “from the beginning it was not so”. Jesus distinguishes between God’s original intention and the reality of people’s sinfulness. In verse 6, he declares in no uncertain terms his thoughts on marriage, “so, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate”. Cornes claims that, “Jesus is not merely saying that when two people have been bonded together, it will be difficult, and cause psychological damage, to pull them apart. He is saying that God himself got involved: God has joined them together, and therefore to pull them apart is to go against the express purposes of God.” (Cornes, 1993, p. 192) According to Cornes, Jesus is willing to allow the legality of divorce but it is never more than that because the partners from the first marriage are still married and always will be married in the eyes of God. Hence the comment that to remarry is to commit adultery. Since people fail to live up to God’s intention for marriage, there had to be laws governing divorce and conditions for the same.

A female minister going through divorce can take heart that though she has failed, she has not been the first nor will she be the last. This does not excuse her failure or inability to make the marriage work, but it does offer some small comfort. Marriage is a difficult endeavour and perhaps God is not a harsh judge but a compassionate parent hurting right along with God’s children.

Looking at verses 1-4 of Deuteronomy 24, it is clear that there are conditions given that regulate divorce and remarriage. Divorce was already a present reality in people’s lives from

before Moses' time. Jesus says that from the beginning this was not to be so. This was not God's intention for marriage, but since you are already doing it, you need some guidelines for the practice. The code of Deuteronomy allowed for divorce but Jesus responds to the Pharisees' question by pointing out the abuse that had happened as a result of the allowance for divorce. The followers of Hillel, a more liberal school of Pharisees, believed that Moses had pronounced his blessing upon divorce and they regularly used such certificates when a wife failed to please her husband. Divorce certificates could be given for spoiling a dish of food or just finding a woman that was more beautiful. The followers of Shammai, a more conservative school of Pharisees, wanted to limit divorce to sexual immorality on the part of the wife. (Ewald, 1991, p.31)

It was a regular thing for women to be given certificates of divorce and remarriage was not even questioned. Remarriage was permissible except for the one instance in Deuteronomy 24: 1-4. The Hillel viewpoint, that husbands could divorce their wives for any reason, was attacked by the Shammaite school. Both the Shammaite and the Hillelite wanted a legal code of behaviour with regards to divorce. The Shammaites were just more strict in what they would allow. To both, Jesus declared, "What God has joined together, let no one separate" (Matthew 19: 6b) Jesus expressed his opposition to men divorcing their wives for no justifiable reason. Jesus makes men morally responsible for the actions when he reiterates God's intention of permanence in marriage as found in Genesis 2: 18-24.

What shall we say about the verse from Malachi 2: 15b-16 which reads, "Both flesh and spirit are his. And what does the one God desire? Godly offspring. So look to yourselves, and do not let anyone be faithless to the wife of his youth. For I hate divorce, says the Lord, the God of Israel...". This section is a part of the prophecy of Malachi in which he declares that God is

angry at certain Israelite men who had abandoned their Israelite wives for no just cause. They simply wanted to marry women from other nations. Israel's identity as a nation was being threatened by this trend and it was a cause of national security. It was not a prohibition against the Mosaic law governing divorce. The issue at hand was the unfaithfulness of Israel in its covenant with God. God hates anything that threatens the covenant between God and Israel.

(Nichols, 1993, p.100) Nichols claims that there is much that God hates,

“God hates all kind of things; suffering, injustice, hardness of heart, death, mistreatment of helpless people, sin of all kinds and so on. In fact the entire story of the people of the Bible is shot through with God's chosen servants doing things that God hates and God reestablishing a covenant of love and justice with them. In other words, God's hating something is not at all the end of the story but something closer to its beginning”
(Nichols, 1991, p. 101)

Regardless, of what God hates, God always offers forgiveness and new beginnings.

This verse from Malachi is a cutting indictment for those of us who have tried to make a marriage work and failed. For a clergy's religious faith, it is a struggle to distance oneself from the text and to see clearly the historical context in which the prophecy of Malachi took place. Sometimes divorce has been abused, that is why we have regulations concerning it. These regulations can be seen not as blanket statement of God's intent but as a indication of God's compassion and caring for humankind. Authors like Nichols remind us that our failure is an opportunity for God to renew us and for us to begin again.

Despite the abuse of divorce, especially in the case of Malachi, I would like to point out that there was a positive side to divorce. Men were supposed to love, take care of and protect their wives. When that did not happen and men were selfish and sinful, then God through Moses, showed men how they could forfeit their obligation and allow the women to be free to marry

someone who would love her and provide for her. There were also several instances in which the rules concerning divorce were beneficial for the woman. Exodus 21: 7-11 sets out conditions protecting a slave wife and Deuteronomy 21: 10-14 helps protect the rights of woman taken captive in war. Women in antiquity were at a disadvantage in such a patriarchal society.

Sometimes they were bound in marriage without their consent. These laws were the beginning of some protection for them under the law. (Ewald, 1991, p.27) Ewald states that

“God was compassionate and flexible even though marriage was meant to be indissoluble.... Jesus in presenting the ideal for marriage did not intend to revoke or contradict God’s compassionate interest in the abused wife as seen by the rules. The church should do all it can to help its people uphold the divine standard for marriage and its ideals, even as many of the rabbis of old endeavoured to do. Yet the church will err on the side of legalism if it fails to see the possibility of divine patience with divorce, in its redemptive sense, as a reflection of God’s concern for the abused. To allow this does not negate the fact that God hates divorce (Mal, 2: 14-16); God hates what men do in putting their wives away for carnal reasons or in inflicting physical and psychological abuse upon them.” (Ewald, 1991, p. 27)

Divorce is not God’s intention. God wills love, the marriage bond, and reconciliation. Yet Jesus uses an exception clause when speaking of divorce. What do we make of this excepting clause of Matthew 5: 31-32, “It was also said, ‘Whoever divorces his wife, let him give her a certificate of divorce.’ But I say to you anyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of unchastity, causes her to commit adultery; and whoever marries a divorced woman commits adultery”. If a man divorced an innocent wife, a woman who had not committed adultery, he made her an adulteress if she remarried. She would be forever stigmatized. Many biblical scholars such as Kummel, Brunner, Montefiore believe that this excepting clause is a later addition. It is not found in either Luke or Mark’s version of Jesus’ discussion on divorce. All three gospels agree that

Jesus holds a very high view of marriage and this excepting clause may be nothing more than stating what is obvious. If the woman committed adultery, it was her own fault when divorce was the consequence. Jesus spoke in a context very different from ours and his listeners would have heard differently that we do. Divorce for adultery was not in question for Jews, Greeks and Romans. According to Heth and Wenham in Jesus and Divorce, the Problem with the Evangelical Consensus, Jesus conceded that divorce could happen in the case of adultery because it was in line with the legal and social mores of his society but remarriage would have been forbidden to his followers by Jesus. They further argue that the exception clause in Matthew was because Matthew was concerned with issues pertinent to Jewish consciousness. Adultery was not just a family issue, it was first and foremost a sin against God to Jews. (Heth and Wenham, 1984, p.123-4) This sin had to be punished by the Jewish community as a whole. It was not up to the husband to decide if he would forgive or pardon such an indiscretion. It was his duty as a Jew to divorce his wife if she committed adultery against him. This is what the exceptive clause meant in its original context. These words of Jesus in Matthew's gospel would have been understood in light of Jewish rules and customs. Modern readers do not have this cultural context from which to interpret Jesus' words. We have tended to view his words as grounds or justifiable reason for divorce. That is not the spirit in which it was written. Certainly divorce was a more compassionate response to adultery than what was originally prescribed by Jewish law. In Deuteronomy 22: 21-22, we are told that a man or woman guilty of adultery was to be put to death by stoning. This gradually changed over the centuries. Neither David nor Bathsheba were put to death because of their adultery. By the time of the prophets, a man could pardon his wife for committing adultery. Hosea is a perfect example of this. In Jesus time, divorce was a

requirement in response to adultery. The Mishnah demanded it. We must take this into account when viewing Jesus' words on divorce. (Ewald, 1991)

It was not God's intention that marriage be ended, but it was also not God's intention to allow women to be abused by men. Another interesting twist to the divorce laws and laws concerning adultery in ancient Judaism is that men could not commit adultery against their wives. A woman committed adultery against her husband if she were to have an extra-marital affair. It was possible for a man to commit adultery against another man by having extra- marital relations with that man's wife. But it was not possible for the man to commit adultery against his own wife. Jesus changed this Jewish conception. A wife should have the same rights as her husband. If having an extra-marital affair was adultery against her husband then her husband having an extra-marital affair was adultery against her. (Cortes, 1993, p. 194)

It is important to see scripture in the context in which it was written and to peel back some of the layers that have been put there in later times and in other contexts. We bring to scripture our own context. Can it speak in the same way today to divorce in our situation? A woman minister's religious faith is strengthened by grappling with these questions and forming some answers that she, from her own experience, can live with.

I believe that traditional verses that speak to divorce are not the only ones that are relevant to our discussion. In instances where marriage is not life-giving for both partners, the marriage can be ended. Jesus talked about the Sabbath being made for humankind, not human-kind for the Sabbath. (Mark 2: 27) Marriage, like the Sabbath, was given for people, not people for the Sabbath. It was not meant to be a legalistic burden, marriage was to be used for the good of people. The Pharisees criticized Jesus for healing on the Sabbath and his disciples for picking

grain on the Sabbath. Jesus and his disciples was also chastised for not washing before eating. Jesus was not a legalist but he knew that we need laws to guide us and to inform our moral conscience. We need to think long and hard about our responsibility to God and to our spouse with regards to marriage. Jesus was most likely more against the Shammaites than the Hillelites. Jesus seemed much more concerned with the spirit of the law than the letter but cautioned against losing sight of our moral responsibility. Jesus reminds us that there are matters more important than the letter of the law, for instance, justice, mercy, grace, compassion and forgiveness. As God's people we should first and foremost embody these qualities. "Marriage is to serve the needs of God's highest creation, even those who don't use it properly the first time, and not to be an end in itself" (Ewald, 1991, p. 46) The Shammaites were more powerful in the time of Jesus than were the followers of Hillel. Yet after the destruction of the temple in A.D. 70, Hillelites became the more popular group of Pharisees following the more compassionate approach of Jesus.

Jesus did not accept either approach wholeheartedly. This author believes that Jesus was not as legalistic as the Shammaites neither was he as liberal as the Hillelites. Jesus referred us to Genesis and the lifelong intention of marriage, and fidelity within it, but in doing this he did not preclude the fact that sometimes marriages would fail. He still upheld Moses' certificate of divorce and the possibility of remarriage should a first marriage fail. Women had no standing or means of support if she was without a husband so it was a merciful thing to allow her remarriage. A prominent example of Jesus' compassion to women in this area was his conversation with the woman at the well.

This writer is uplifted by looking at other passages of scripture alongside those

traditionally used with regards to divorce. My own religious faith is strengthened by reminders of God's intention not just for marriage but also for us as people. Justice, mercy, compassion, forgiveness are qualities from God that we are in need of. These, in this writer's opinion, are more important than the letter of the law.

Several favourite scriptures get quoted with regards to church leadership and divorce. In the Old Testament, in Leviticus 21, priests are not permitted to marry a woman who had been divorced. "They shall be holy to their God.... they shall not marry a prostitute or a woman who has been defiled, neither shall they marry a woman divorced from her husband. For they are holy to their God" (Lev.21: 6a, 7) A higher standard was held up for God's special agents. It is not that divorced women and prostitutes were on the same level. It was simply that a priest who was to be holy, was not to have a woman who had sexual relations with another man. They were permitted to marry a widow, but only a widow of a priest. The high priest was restricted even in this area, he was to marry only a virgin from his own people. (Cornes, 1993, p. 140)

1 Timothy 3:2 reads, "Now a bishop must be above reproach, married only once, ..." 1 Timothy 3: 12 reads, "Let deacons be married only once and let them manage their children and their households well." and Titus 1:5b-6 reads, "...should appoint elders in every town as I directed you, someone who is blameless, married only once..." This qualification is addressed to leadership only and does not refer to general membership. There are various ways of interpreting these passages. Ewald in Jesus and Divorce, says that it could mean that a bishop or deacon should be married but this view is not the likely one since celibacy is upheld and Paul, himself, was single. (See Matthew 19:12, 1 Corinthians 7:7-8, and 1 Corinthians 9:5.) It could mean that a bishop or elder should be married only once. If their spouse died or divorced them they

could not remarry. This is also an unlikely interpretation since nowhere in scripture does it prevent remarriage for a man whose wife has died. Romans 7:3 and 1 Corinthians 7:39 offers full support for remarriage in this case. Younger widows were encouraged to remarry. (1 Timothy 5:14). Paul, in his letter to the Corinthians, chapter 7 talks about marriage. He says it is well if you can remain celibate but “if they are not practising self- control, they should marry, for it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion” (1 Cor. 7:9) It could mean that a man could not have two wives at the same time, prohibiting polygamy. This was a rarity for Jews and Gentiles in the first century so it was not necessary to warn leaders against it. There is another possible interpretation. Anyone divorced and remarried, should not hold office in the church because it could bring reproach and provide a bad example. This would hold true even if that divorce and remarriage took place before their conversion to Christ. God’s rules apply not just to the church but also to the society at large. Ewald argues that that is the case for all of God’s standards, why single out just divorce and remarriage. The purpose of conversion was to transform lives. Paul held himself to be the chief of sinners before his conversion. To have a past that is far from moral is not a mark against the gospel - quite the opposite. God can change even the most immoral life to something new and wonderful. Paul was changed from a murdering opposer of the gospel to one of its greatest proponents (Galatians 1:13). The gospel message is that of forgiveness, of transformation. Ewald claims, and this author agrees, that the most likely interpretation is that one who holds office should be faithful to his own wife. He should be faithful now that he is a new creation in Christ. He should strive for a faithful, enduring marriage. Paul is most probably speaking to the present, not the past life of a Christian. (Ewald, 1991, p. 91-94) This is certainly still a matter of discussion and concern for many Christians.

Emerson, in Divorce, the Church and Remarriage, states unequivocally that marriages die. He states that most churches recognize this but some only allow for the death of marriage on the death of one of the spouses. But the real question here is “how do you know when a marriage is dead? Can a marriage be dead while both partners are still physically alive? Emerson argues that marriage is not simply a physical matter, it is a spiritual matter as well. The Roman Catholic church holds only that a marriage may die when one partner physically dies yet they call marriage a sacrament which obviously includes a spiritual element to marriage. The Mormons hold that marriage has absolute indissolubility; when one spouse dies, the marriage still is valid in heaven. Emerson holds that “the death of a marriage is a spiritual matter as much as a physical one. It may be killed by physical factors, but death is only one of these. Adultery, desertion and others may be just as real” (Emerson, 1961, p.42). So can you be an elder, deacon, pastor, bishop if you have experienced a divorce since your conversion? Ewald answers this query by stating:

“Let us look at practical experience, if some congregations did not use divorced persons to staff boards and Sunday School classes, they would be drastically short of leaders. Church leadership should certainly be of the highest moral standards, but perhaps it is time to look at some notable moral failures within the Bible story. In light of these, room may be found for some gracious exceptions. Abraham put away Hagar at Sarah’s insistence. Judah, patriarch of the tribe, visited a harlot, not realizing it was his daughter-in-law. Samson, the deliverer of Israel, visited a Philistine harlot. King David was guilty of adultery and murder. Hosea, the prophet, was ordered by God to marry a harlot as an illustration of God’s own patience with unfaithful Israel. If any of today’s church leaders were to examine their thought life and fantasy world, there would be many who would fail under Jesus’ lofty definition of adultery”. (Ewald, 1991, p. 93-94)

Leviticus 21, 1 Tim.3: 2,12, and Titus 1: 5b-6 are very stringent in their

requirements for church leadership. The fact that many scholars cannot agree to what exactly these verses are referring, reminds a divorcing clergy person of how imbedded scripture can be in its *sitz im leben*. What does God require of church leaders in our time and place? We are to work out our salvation with fear and trembling. Surely this is one of those cases. What do we make of these passages and how will we live with them? How do they relate to the conditions of our society today? This writer believes it asks us to live faithfully within a current marriage. The gospel is about transformation and constantly being called to live as best as we are able knowing that God still loves us and forgives our transgressions. So a divorcing clergy person's faith can be strengthened by prayerful reflection on what God wants of us.

So what does all this say to us about divorce? Jesus only refers to one part of the old Testament text, that of Genesis 2:24. The Old Testament permits divorce under Mosaic law but it never prefers it. The prophets, as represented by Malachi, say that God hates divorce. At times, divorce is simply disallowed, Deut. 22: 13-19 and Malachi 2: 10-16. Remarriage is allowed in some circumstances and not others but it is never encouraged. (Lev. 21: 5-8, 10-15 and Ezek. 44: 21ff) God is always on the side of faithfulness even when the other party is unfaithful. The prophets talk incessantly about reconciliation with the spouse. God is seen as the faithful partner in marriage and Israel as the one constantly committing adultery by chasing after foreign gods. Yet God always seeks to reconcile with Israel. I believe this is held up as a supreme lesson of how we are to strive to make our marriages caring and enduring. (Cornes, 1993, p. 177-179) Unfortunately, we are the human part of the equation and we all too often fail.

What could we say is a New Testament view of marriage? Jesus and Paul were against divorce. Both recognized the reality of sin in the world. Both tried to take into account

the context in which they lived. In Jewish culture of the time, women's rights were non-existent. They were property of the men in their lives and if a woman did not have a husband she was in a precarious situation. Jewish law permitted divorce. "No judge or court was involved. A man simply had to write out a bill of divorce in his own hand and in the presence of at least two witnesses, he had to date it and it had to be delivered to his wife - although in certain circumstances throwing it at her in a fit of anger constituted a valid delivery!" (Cornes, 1993, p. 181) Jesus was concerned about women who were easily divorced without grounds. Jesus' comments on divorce was very much a radical statement about the dignity and worth of women. Heth and Wenham (1984), hold the view that Jesus absolutely prohibited divorce for any reason. According to them Jesus only allowed divorce for adultery because it was a Jewish law. The man who divorced his wife for adultery was not held responsible for the marital breakup but he was to remain single. Jesus did not permit remarriage under any circumstances. (Heth and Wenham, 1984, p. 198-199). This author does not hold this extreme view of Jesus' response to human failure.

Paul lived in a time when the return of Jesus was felt to be imminent. This greatly influenced his view of marriage, divorce, and celibacy. Anything that did not further the preparation for the kingdom of God was deemed irrelevant. Christians were to be pure and blameless and in this regards neither marriage, divorce or sexual activity were relevant. Marriage was encouraged if one could not be celibate, it was better to marry than to be aflame with passion. Divorce was not permitted because of the special requirements of the kingdom of God. (Nichols 1991, p. 111-112) Both Jesus and Paul recognized that marriages did end. Divorce was a result of the sin inherent in creation. It is a testament to human brokenness. To deny

forgiveness to someone who had failed at marriage was an affront to the whole gospel of forgiveness and redemption. Jesus gave new meaning to the idea of forgiveness in Matthew 18: 21 when Peter asked him how often he was to forgive someone who sinned against him. Peter limited forgiveness to seven times. Jesus enlarged it by declaring “not seven times, I tell you, but seventy times seven”. (Matt. 18:22) The woman caught in adultery was treated with compassion by Jesus and told she was to go and live a better life. She was forgiven. (John 8) “The final word of Scripture is not about broken covenants but renewed ones, not about judgement but about mercy not about falling away from a wrathful God but being gathered up in the arms of a loving one.” (Nichols, 1991, p. 115).

A clergy person’s religious faith is renewed and uplifted as one realizes the extent of God’s forgiveness and mercy. Yes, we often fail but God is always there to restore and to forgive. If God is able to do that for us, can we not learn to forgive ourselves? This writer believes it is possible. The church has through the ages interpreted Jesus’s words on divorce in a strictly legalistic sense and has applied them without flinching. It is time to challenge this interpretation in favour of one that allows for grace in the midst of our moral imperfection.

To briefly summarize the vast content of this chapter, it all hinges on interpretation. We interpret scripture according to our own context allowing for tradition, experience, and reason. There is evidence for use of experience in interpreting Scripture at the Council of Jerusalem recorded in Acts 15. God’s intention is most certainly for permanence in marriage. Yet it is evident that marriages sometimes fail. What does the Bible say on divorce?

“A biblical scholar once commented that if you took a dozen or so of the very best of his colleagues and set them the task of describing clearly what the Bible says about divorce, you would get a dozen or so wildly different results - all equally informed and

accurate.. The best and most faithful students of the Bible differ about what the book means on the subject.” (Nichols, 1993, p.85)

Scholars are divided on the issues of God and divorce. Some would claim that God’s unequivocal answer with regards to divorce is no, not for any reason. Others are willing to allow other portions of scripture to inform the divorce debate. These scholars would allow for Jesus comments regarding the Sabbath, and forgiveness and restoration.

There were Jewish laws governing divorce from very early on in their history as a people. Though as Malachi claims, God hates divorce, there are times when laws regarding divorce was a positive thing. It protected women’s rights. If men did not take care of their wives then it was the merciful thing to divorce her and set her free to marry someone who would love and protect her. Men who took slave wives or took women captive in war to be wives were not permitted to get rid of them for any reason. They were forbidden divorce. They had to take care of these wives for the rest of their lives. Jesus was compassionate, keeping in mind that without a husband a woman had no source of income. A reminder from Jesus with regards to the Sabbath is equally valid, in my opinion, for the case of marriage and divorce. Marriage like the Sabbath is given to meet the needs of people, they are not an end in themselves.

Church leaders were certainly expected to hold the highest possible moral behaviour. We are called to be faithful to our current spouse and to strive for a loving, enduring marriage. Marriages can die in many ways, not the least of which is desertion, abuse, and adultery. We have all sinned however and God is merciful and just. God transforms lives and certainly God would forgive his special chosen servants. I do not believe that God would single out one failing and make our lives miserable because of it. That goes against everything I have ever believed to

be true of a loving, compassionate God. Nicols claims that God does not have a single clear word about divorce but God does have a clear word about something more important, the restoration and transformation of broken human beings. (Nichols, 1993, p.87)

This discussion about the biblical thoughts on divorce mirrors my own struggle with these passages since my separation and divorce. I believe that when a clergy woman goes through a divorce, she struggles intensely with her faith. She tries to make sense of who she is as a woman in ministry. A literal reading of some of these passages, for example, Timothy and Titus, have been cutting and hurtful. Does she believe in a God who is so demanding as to not permit failure and the opportunity to begin again? Should she be in ministry if she cannot live up to such high ideals? Her religious faith, what she believes about God, God's mercy, God's expectations, modelling Christian behaviour, all are brought into question. Can she love and serve a God who will demand that she spend the rest of her life paying for the mistake of divorce? Can she proclaim the love of God if God insists that she live a celibate life that is not of her choosing? She finds herself wanting to be faithful, wanting to be the best Christian, woman, pastor that she can be and wrestling with how she can do that. She finds that throwing herself on God's mercy and clinging to God's love despite any failure on her part to be the way she goes. She gravitates toward biblical references to God's forgiveness, transformation, and new life. But she will never cease to find the verses that seem demanding and unequivocal to be abrasive and wounding. They will always be a part of her cross that she carries in her ministry.

A divorced female clergy would at times find it most difficult to deal with some of the practical applications of ministry. I believe it is more difficult if she has not remarried. Many churches tend to look at clergy that are remarried as "married" not "divorced". If you are single,

you are still tagged with the label, “divorced”. On one hand, not being currently in a marriage limits one with regards to preaching on this topic. It is hard to feel confident telling other people how to navigate through marriage when your ship went down. It is also hard to offer ministry to the married for the same reason. On the other hand, it gives one the benefit of experience even if the marriage failed. It gives one the benefit of searching and finding what went wrong and what is necessary for a good marriage. It shows one the necessity of not taking one’s partner for granted. Those are things that often do come across in preaching, listening to people during marriage problems and especially in pre-marriage counselling. Knowing the pain and anguish that often accompanies marriage breakdown, inspires one to help those going through marital difficulties and to have discussions around commitment with those seeking to be married. I don’t mean putting undue influence or pressure on someone to save their marriage, that may not be the right course for some. But I believe a divorced woman can put forth both sides of the equation in a way that perhaps those who have never been divorced may be able to.

Divorce is always an issue for the divorced clergy woman. She has to conduct marriages, lead pre-marriage classes, counsel those having marital difficulties. People look to her to hold up the Christian way of life. Her own divorce is always in the back of her mind. She may have dealt with it and made peace with it as far as she is able. It will always be something which will have to be held in tension; the humbleness of failure, the gratitude of forgiveness, the benefit of experience.

Chapter 5 - The Case Study and the Literature

There are some similarities between the literature and the case study. Some themes are evident in both. To this I now turn. The woman in the case study was very concerned about being sure that she and her spouse were ready for marriage. The intent of marriage is that it be a lifelong commitment and that it be entered into with full consent before witnesses and before God. That is the way marriage has been viewed since the time of Moses. The case study presented a woman who wanted, as an ordained minister, to be a model of Christian living. She wanted to be above reproach. These are high expectations but they are not just hers. In the literature, it is seen that parishoners have high expectations for their clergy. The Scripture holds up high expectations in Titus, Timothy and Leviticus for those who would lead in the church.

Mary, in our case study, takes responsibility for the failure or success of her marriage believing that if she tried hard enough, she could make it work. She could fix whatever was wrong. She felt shame, self pity and guilt that she was divorcing. In the review of the literature we saw that women often take relationships, and especially marriage, upon themselves as their territory. If that relationship fails, they feel intense guilt, regardless of who initiates the divorce. Women still blame themselves. We also saw that regardless of the clergy's gender, during divorce, they have a higher sense of guilt and failure.

Mary finds herself in major grief battling identity issues. At the Post Office, Mary realizes how very much her life has changed in a matter of minutes. She is no longer Greg's wife in any real way. She is not a married woman in ministry anymore. Questions around identity abound in the literature. Women define themselves by their relationships because for them

relationships are all important.

There is much questioning by Mary as to whether God can love her, whether her church can accept her now that she is divorced. This is certainly a valid concern given the literature that shows the job loss and lack of promotions. Mary's confidence has really been shaken. She questions whether she can conduct weddings, lead pre-marriage classes, counsel, or preach. She wonders whether she can lead a church if she can't keep her marriage together. Others make cutting comments that imply that she is to blame in the relationship breakdown. Some believe that she does not take her marriage vows seriously. The literature shows that this drop in confidence seems to be the case with ministers divorcing. This is true especially for female ministers for they take responsibility for harmonious relationships. The literature also shows that it is not just the ministers who wonder whether they can perform ministry tasks as well as they could previously. Some hiring committees in the church, some parishioners in the pews, and some colleagues in ministry doubt the ability or acceptability of the divorced minister.

In phase one, Mary found herself initially clinging to God because she was in extreme crisis. We have learned from Wold that women's greatest crisis is often divorce. From Borysenko, we learned that breakdown of relationships create a dark night of the soul for many women. She finds help in the Psalms and they calm her troubled soul. In Phase two, once Mary begins to feel a little more steady, she is angry at God. She has feelings of entitlement. She felt she warranted special treatment because she had given her life to God and was angry when God didn't give her what she wanted. Ford, in Spiritual Divorce, talked about the opposite of entitlement, cultivating a life of gratitude to enhance one's spiritual life.

Mary's third phase of the journey was one of intense self-examination in which she

questioned and struggled with her failure and her imperfection. She tried to forgive herself and her husband for the mistakes they made and now allows herself to be human, not perfect. The most she can do is try. Ewald in Jesus and Divorce, made it perfectly clear that we'd be drastically short of leaders in the church if they could not be divorced. All of us would fail under Jesus ideal of adultery. We all sin. We all need to accept it, take responsibility, learn to forgive, and move on.

In this period of self examination, Mary learns that she can use her suffering for the good of others. Messer talks about the image of wounded healer. Its okay to struggle with the questions even if there are no answers. God takes difficult circumstances and works it for good, for Mary's own growth. Borysenko, talked about the importance of sharing stories as part of our spirituality, sharing for our own and others' benefit. Ford in Spiritual Divorce, talks about our growth as human beings and how all our life experiences are geared toward teaching us and leading us onward toward wholeness and healing of our wounds. Divorce is nothing if not a spiritual experience. The literature backs this up completely.

God was portrayed as very demanding but also as very loving. The discussion on what the Bible says bears this out. Mary experienced God in both these ways as she struggled with her divorce. Borysenko claims that women have a direct connection with the Divine and that images of a punishing God no longer have relevance for many women. I agree with her. That is the conclusion that Mary came to through her long struggle. A merciful, loving, forgiving God is the only one she could live with and serve. This also converges with Noren's concept of the internal authority of the preacher in which women interpret the Bible based on their own experience.

France comments on the importance of interpretation in trying to ascertain what the Bible is saying to a particular topic or situation. It is important to realize that some of Jesus' words as well as some of the Old Testament literature were written for a specific reason within the context of the time. We saw in the literature that some divorce laws were there to protect women's rights. Women were very vulnerable in antiquity. Some divorce laws forbade divorce to men in some instances, particularly slave wives and women taken captive in war. In other instances divorce was allowed so that the divorced women could remarry and find someone to take care of them. Some proponents of Jewish law were using Moses' certificate of divorce to get rid of wives they didn't want regardless of what she had done or not done. Jesus uses an exception clause to reign in this practice. He also used the exception to allow for the law that was already in existence. This law had already been softened. Initially a woman found in adultery was stoned to death. By the time of Jesus, Jewish law demanded that she be divorced because she committed not only a sin against her husband but also against God. Looking at the context of Jewish law, it is interesting that men could not commit adultery by their definitions. This is certainly a pronounced example of the patriarchal culture of the day. Malachi talks about God hating divorce because there was so much intermarrying between Jews and people of other nations that their very identity and survival was at stake.

France also cites the use of experience to interpret scripture. In fact, he shows us that experience was used to interpret scripture as far back as when the Acts was written. The Council of Jerusalem was a prime example of allowing God's continuing revelation to be a factor in living honest Christian lives. Mary did not talk about using other portions of Scripture to inform the Divorce debate but that was also a relevant theme throughout the literature. Perhaps some of the

confusion that Mary experienced during her divorce was due to the fact that there is no single clear word on divorce in Scripture as Nichols claims. A hundred biblical scholars would give a hundred different opinions. Emerson, Ewald, Nichols and Ford in particular come down on the side of divorce being allowed but not preferable. Heth and Wenhem and Cornes are clearly of the persuasion that Divorce is not allowed, nor is remarriage. According to Nichols, the clear word that scripture does put forth is that of transformation and restoration. Mary finds this path to be the one she takes.

Mary doesn't state the exact reasons for her marriage dissolution but we are told in the literature that marriages die for many reasons not just through the death of one of the spouses. Adultery, desertion and abuse, among others, are valid reasons that marriages die.

Mary, in our case study talks about the existence of three phases that she goes through. The first being so devastating that she is clinging to God. In the second phase she is feeling more able to care for herself and allows herself to be angry at God. The third phase is one of acceptance and moving on. In the literature the devastation is apparent as is the final acceptance and making peace. The second phase, one of being angry at God is not specifically mentioned in the literature. Anger at God is a reaction, an emotion that some people would find very hard to accept and acknowledge. The church did not comment on this aspect of grief.

The literature also showed several things that were not evident in the case study. There has been nothing *specifically* written about *female clergy and divorce*. That is certainly not because female clergy do not get divorced. I am living proof of that. But perhaps it is partially due to the fact that as Zikmund, Lummis, and Chang claim, that divorced clergy women are more than twice as likely to have been divorced before entering ministry. They have already worked

through the questions of identity and who God is for them. The divorce has no connection with their work as ministers. Stresses or problems related to their work is not a factor where it is with men. Men often divorce in the midst of ministry and have messy situations to deal with in their churches and denominations. It would be interesting to see some things written about female clergy who do divorce while they are in active ministry because they do exist. This assertion of Zikmund, Lummis and Chang may be the reason why there are virtually no support systems for female clergy experiencing divorce. Certainly Mary would have benefited from a support system to balance the cutting remarks she heard from well - meaning friends and parishioners. Being able to struggle with the confidence issues and the scriptures in a safe place also would have been a major asset.

In summary many of the issues that our composite woman dealt with in our case study were most certainly themes that came up again and again in the literature. The notable exception was that nothing had been written specifically for divorcing female clergy. A partial answer to the exception is that many women are already divorced before they enter ministry and have therefore done much of the struggling, questioning and spiritual growth needed. This is probably why few if any support systems, geared specifically to divorcing female clergy, are available in the church courts.

Next I would like to offer an answer to my thesis question - how does a female clergy's personal experience of divorce affect her religious faith. I would also like to point out some changes I see that have happened with regards to clergy and divorce.

Chapter 6 - Conclusion

There are some differences in our society in the last twenty five years when some of the articles I reviewed had been written. In most mainline churches today I do not believe that divorcing ministers would be in serious professional trouble in terms of job loss. A few years ago a colleague from the Dutch Reformed church commented that to be divorced in that denomination meant leaving the ministry. Perhaps some churches may still make things difficult in these respects but I believe it is probably more the exception than the rule. When I divorced I did not fear for my job. I was more concerned with how difficult the transition would be in my ministry. What would I have to live through? What reactions and opinions would I have to deal with.

This is also the case with job mobility and promotions. I don't believe as many divorcing clergy are penalized in this way. Many people in the 'prime' positions in my own denomination are on their second, sometimes, third, marriage. Perhaps a sense of inferiority produces industry so that some go further because of this. Morgan commented in 1982 that there was more tolerance for divorced people but not for divorced clergy. I believe that is changing. That is not to say that it is treated lightly when a clergy person divorces. I believe there is more willingness and openness to allow pastors to be human. Perhaps because there are many more people in our pews going through divorce or are remarried, they are able to see the pain of broken relationships and be less judgmental and more compassionate. Some congregations are more judgmental and not apt to allow for a grieving minister, but not all congregations are. There are less unreal expectations among most, not all, of the laity. Some ridiculous comments I heard as I was divorcing shows that some of the prejudice still exists. Your competency as a minister is not

as questioned or certainly not openly questioned.

Many ministers are now not willing to carry such an unrealistic workload that it damages family life. I expect that some of the changes with regards to unreal expectations has been facilitated by the increase in women in ministry. More women are entering ministry, at least in mainline churches. They are splitting their time and energy between ministry duties, and family obligations. Often in the past, male ministers worked many hours in the church while the stay at home wife and mother took over more of the family responsibilities. Women in ministry often do not have this luxury. They are more likely to set firm boundaries around their time in the church and time for family and friends. Many women are constantly willing to reinforce these boundaries.

I believe that ministry is still as stressful, in some ways, perhaps more so. More is expected of clergy these days. Often it is not enough that one be able to lead worship, preach and run a meeting, one had better be able to offer the best in Christian education, chaplaincy, counselling, spiritual direction, and social work. Advocacy in the community, appeals to government on behalf of the voiceless in our society are often an integral part of ministry in some areas.

I don't believe that there is as much pressure on the spouse to be a part of the ministerial team. Many women today have demanding careers of their own and churches recognize this. With the advent of more women in ministry positions, many men are now ministerial spouses. With their own jobs and careers, the male spouse may be disinclined to be involved with more work and responsibility in their wives churches.

In many churches the lack of privacy in living in the manse is not an issue. Many

clergy are choosing not to live in manses but to own their own home for many reasons, not the least of which is financial equity at retirement. Some ministers do not even live in the community in which they minister. Perhaps some of that is also influenced by women in ministry and people entering ministry later in life. They own their own homes and want to continue to live there if possible. In urban and suburban areas that is quite the norm.

In the past, low financial remuneration was a stressful part of ministry. I expect that today, this is not as prevalent. It is true that ministers in some denominations without clergy pay scales are not being paid highly. Most mainline ministers get a realistic pay even if it is not up to what a professional in another profession would be making. Also many ministers are married and their spouses, male or female, are working in a professional capacity making a decent salary. I don't believe this is as much of a concern as it used to be when male ministers carried the load and women were stay at home moms not contributing a salary to the household.

There have been many changes in society in the last twenty years but ministers will continue to struggle with their own divorces. I began this thesis wanting to find out how a female clergy's personal experience of divorce impacted her religious faith. To this I offer the following answer.

Briefly, the old adage is true, "What doesn't kill you makes you stronger". It is unfortunate that some women going through divorce have ended up on stress related disability or have permanently left ministry. I believe that the majority of women experiencing divorce reevaluate *everything* in their lives. It really is a crisis and a dark night of the soul. A female clergy's religious faith is brought into question. She struggles with the scriptures as traditionally

interpreted. She grapples with the narrow opinions of people who have not lived through such an experience and she wrestles with what God really requires from her. Joan D. Chittister, in her book Heart of Flesh, tells us that it is in a crisis moment that everything changes.

“ It is precisely when the life we are living begins to dry up and crumble in our hands, when what served to sustain us yesterday fails to work today, that God becomes a different kind of reality and sight becomes seeing. In those times, the God we came to know in calmer days begins to wane and fade. Old answers to new questions cease to convince...old pieties seem ..hollow.. old understandings become embarrassing...Everything we ever thought about life, its people, its values, its goals begins to reel before our very faces. What once we were sure of now becomes the questions that lead us to another stage of development.....Pain and failure make astounding spiritual directors. Hurt and disappointment make amazing guides. Dislocation and rejection make spiritual creatures of us all...when what is amazingly and bewilderingly new intrudes into the living room of our souls, it is time to realize that something wonderful has happened, yes, but that life as we knew it will also never again be the same.”
(Chittister, 1998)

There is so much soul searching and struggling to gain one's equilibrium. Because women are the guardians of relationships, in a divorce she deals with such a profound deep sense of failure and blames herself. Her direct connection with the Divine often seems severed.

This life crisis also makes her contend with such major questions of identity that she can never be the same again. Who she is as a person and as a minister is different. She struggles incessantly with the scriptures. Perhaps it is similar to Jacob wrestling with the angel at Peniel. He knows that he has sinned against his brother and his father and he wants to come back home. Jacob wrestles with the angel until daybreak. When the angel sees that he does not prevail against Jacob, he strikes Jacob on the hip socket and puts his hip out of joint. The angel says “Let me go, for the day is breaking”. But Jacob said, “I will not let you go unless you bless me”. (Genesis 32: 24ff) Then the man said, “You shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, for you have striven

with God and with humans and have prevailed”. Jacob went on his way limping.

The woman who divorces may be aware of her sin, not that divorce is a sin, but often in the process of marriage and divorce there is much sin. This awareness grieves her deeply. But she wants to come home to God. She wants to feel her Divine connection again. The woman who experiences this dark night of the soul struggles with God and with humans. At daybreak, she can demand a blessing from God. She wants to know her struggle has meant something, is worth something. A female clergy person’s religious faith is strengthened and renewed. She comes to believe that God welcomes us back and blesses us with new understanding, renewed compassion, and inspiration to share our story for the benefit of others. A female divorced minister will always be different than before the life-altering experience of divorce. Like Jacob who limps on his way after his encounter with the angel, a female clergy’s personal experience of divorce will forever colour her ministry, her religious faith and her life. I believe the end result is often a more humble and flexible person, willing to embrace her limitations and accept her imperfection. I believe the woman will feel a new gratitude for all of God’s gifts and for the learning that comes with experience. A transformation and restoration takes place and like Nichols said in

Ending Marriage. Keeping Faith.

“ Here is the consistently clear word about divorce to be found in scripture: we who have experienced the brokenness of divorce are sought by a God who is bent on restoring us, not condemning us or putting us through a moral CAT scan. If, in the Bible’s terms, there are aspects of our divorcing situation that calls for repentance, then we are summoned to that - but only for the purpose of restoration.....the only thing that really matters in your divorce is ...is confronting a failure and a sense of loss, and maybe even a wrongdoing, and being offered a new future. “ (Nichols, 1993, p. 120)

God offers us that new beginning today and that blessing that allows our pain to benefit others.

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